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CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

(October, 1850—January, 1851)

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CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

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CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

By
C. A. SAINTE-BEUVE

VOL. IV
(*October, 1850—January, 1851*)

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by
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RABELAIS ¹

¶ Monday, October 7, 1850.

UNDER this title a writer who is as yet little known, and whom from the nature of some of his ideas I imagine to be young, has just published a rather pleasing little work on Rabelais, which he ranges in a kind of gallery of *French Legends*. The title of legend shows clearly enough that the young writer lays no claim to trace an exact, rigorous and critical biography of Rabelais, and that he has not scrupled to accept the Rabelais of tradition, transformed at pleasure, as he has been, by popular imagination. I shall presently say a word about the spirit in which this little pamphlet has been composed, after having myself talked a moment with the master, and tried to refresh my idea of him.

A talk with Rabelais, if it were indeed possible, if it were given to us to seize him for an instant as he was in reality, and to hear him, what should we not give for the privilege? Everybody has his ideal in the past, and the nature, the vocation of every mind could not, I imagine, declare itself better than by the choice of the person it would first go in search of, if we were allowed to return to an earlier period. I know of some, however, who have no predilection, who would wander indifferently from one to another, or even would not go at all. Let us leave these spirits without love and passion, without any desire; they are the lukewarm ones: they lack the sacred fire in Letters. I know of others who would hasten to more than one at a time, and who in their curiosity and tenderness would embrace a number of favourite authors without quit- knowing where to begin. These spirits are not indifferent like the others; they are not lukewarm, but a little fickle and unsteady. I fear that we

¹ *French Legends.—Rabelais.* By M. Eugène Noël. (1850.)

critics are something like them. But the good and commendable spirits are those who have in the past a well-defined taste, a well-declared preference, who would make straight for Molière, for example, without even stopping before Bossuet; these are they, in short, who dare to have a passion, a highly-placed imagination, and who follow it. On these conditions, if you were able to spend a whole day in the sixteenth century, and talk each with his chosen author, with his philosopher, to whom would you go?

Calvin, Rabelais, Amyot, Montaigne, are the four great prose-writers of the sixteenth century; of these Montaigne and Rabelais may rather be called two poets. I do not here count a crowd of second-class writers, worthy of being mentioned and greeted beside them. Now, supposing this possibility of spending a day in the sixteenth century with one's chosen author, I doubt whether Calvin would nowadays have many customers. The good Amyot would attract us a little with his kind old man's smile and his somewhat languid graces. But Montaigne—all the world would go to him; all, excepting a sufficiently numerous and decided group, who, even whilst regretting the necessity of making a choice between the two, would pay their devotions to Rabelais.

In the taste and the cult of some persons for Rabelais there is even more than admiration, there is some of that excited curiosity which is attracted by the unknown and the mysterious. We know almost beforehand what Montaigne would be like; we can imagine well enough how he would appear to us at the first approach; but Rabelais, who knows? The life and real character of Rabelais have been much discussed. I believe, and every reflecting reader will believe with me, that those who expected to find in him exactly the man of his book, a kind of priest-physician, jovial, playing the fool, always feasting and half-drunk, would have been greatly disappointed. Rabelais' debauchery was altogether of the imagination and the humour; it was a study debauchery, the debauchery of a great scholar, full of good sense, who, pen in hand, let himself go to his heart's content. However, I am no less convinced that, after a very little time spent in intercourse with him, we should, after associating with the man of science and study, and no doubt of very good

company for his century, soon find at bottom the incomparable jester. It would be impossible for the natural flow of such a vein to contain itself and not to surge up. The person of the man, noble in bearing and venerable as it might appear at first sight, must at times have become animated and have delighted in a thousand sallies of that inner genius, that fine irresistible humour, which disported itself in his romance, or rather in his drama. I will say that of Rabelais as of Molière. The latter was not always gay and amusing, far from it; they used to call him the *Contemplative One*; when he was alone he was even sad and melancholy. But it is very certain that, once aroused and stirred up in conversation, he must have again become the Molière that we know. Thus it was no doubt with Rabelais.

Etienne Dolet, the same who was burned alive for the crime of heresy, has left us a pretty Latin poem on Rabelais, Physician and Anatomist. In this poem Dolet introduces a man who has been *hanged*, and who has had the honour, after his execution, of being dissected in the public amphitheatre of Lyons by Rabelais in person, or at least of having furnished him with the subject of a fine lecture on Anatomy: 'In vain has hostile Fortune tried to cover me with insults and opprobrium, says the defunct in Dolet's verses; it was written that it should be otherwise. If I have perished ignominiously, behold how in a moment, by the favour of the great Jupiter, I obtain more than any one would have dared to hope. I am exposed and dissected in a public theatre: a learned physician, taking me for his theme, explains to all how Nature has fabricated the body of man, with beauty, with art, and a perfect harmony. A numerous circle surrounds me and from all sides contemplates and admires in me, whilst listening, the marvels of the human organization'. Truly, on the day when Rabelais delivered this public lecture on Anatomy in the amphitheatre of Lyons, he must have had, like Vesalius, that venerable air of a Doctor and Master of which some of his biographers have spoken, and he worthily represented in his person the majesty of science.

The son of an inn-keeper or an apothecary of Chinon, it is well-known that he began by being a monk, and what is more, a monk of the Order of Cordeliers. The serious-

ness and elevation of his tastes, the natural and generous freedom of his inclinations, soon made him feel out of his element in a convent of this Order, in this age of decline. He left it, and tried another and less contemptible one, that of the Benedictines, but he was as little able to accommodate himself to this as to the other; then he quitted the regular, that is to say, the monachal habit, and assumed that of the secular priest; *he threw*, as they say, *his frock to the nettles*, and went to Montpellier to study medicine. The little that is known with certainty of his positive and non-legendary biography has been well gathered and set forth in the thirty-second volume of the *Memoirs* of Nicéron: if the honest biographer represents Rabelais with rather austere or at least with very serious features, and in all sobriety, he has at least the advantage of saying nothing at a venture, and of being free from any system. We may read there the Bulls that Rabelais was astute enough to obtain from the Holy See on one of his visits to Rome in the train of the Cardinal du Bellay, and by means of which he prudently set himself right with his enemies in France. It is stated, in a Bull dated January 17, 1536, that he is permitted to practise in all places the art of medicine, gratuitously however, and *excluding* the application of steel and fire; the priests were forbidden these kinds of operations. But nothing is said of the Pantagruelian books which he had already composed and was still to compose; and Rabelais at no time thought himself obliged to refrain from writing them.

Nothing is more awkward than to speak fittingly of these books, for Rabelais has a licence peculiar to himself, for which the most enthusiastic criticism cannot assume the responsibility. When one tries to read Rabelais aloud, even before men (for before women it is impossible), one is always in the position of a man who tries to cross an immense open space covered with mud and ordure: every moment one has to take a big stride in order to get across without sinking too deeply into the mire; and that is difficult. A lady once reproached Sterne for the indecencies in his *Tristram Shandy*; just then a boy of three was playing on the floor and exposing himself in all innocence: 'Look! said Sterne, my book is like that three-year-old youngster rolling on the carpet'. But, with Rabelais the child is grown up; he is a man, he is a monk,

he is a giant, he is Gargantua, Pantagruel, or at least Panurge, and he goes on concealing nothing. Here it is not possible to say *Look !* to the ladies, and even when speaking before men and in cold blood, one has to choose.

I will choose. In the First Book of Rabelais, *Gargantua*, which was not perhaps the first in order of writing, but which is the most connected, the most complete in itself, having a beginning, a middle and an end, we find a few admirable chapters, not too serious, not too farcical, in which the great and sensible parts of Rabelais show themselves. I mean the chapters which treat of Gargantua's education. After the folhes of the commencement, Gargantua's birth by the left ear, the mirific description of his *layette*, the first signs he gives of his intelligence, and a very nonsensical answer he makes his father, by which the latter recognizes with admiration the wonderful understanding of his son, he is given a master, a Sophist in Latin Letters; and then begins the most ingenious and striking satire on the bad education of the times. Gargantua was supposed to have been born in the second half of the fifteenth century, and is at first subjected to that scholastic, pedantic education, full of laborious and complicated puerilities, which seemed expressly made to stunt good and noble minds. His father Grandgousier meanwhile saw that he was studying very hard, and becoming only more foolish every day; he is greatly astonished to hear from one of his compeers, the Viceroy of I know not what neighbouring country, that any young boy who has studied only two years under a good master, and by some new method just discovered, knows more than all the little prodigies of the olden time, given over to masters *whose knowledge is nothing but brutishness*. Gargantua is brought face to face with young Eudemon, a boy of twelve years, who addresses him with a good grace and politeness, and with a noble modesty which is not prejudicial to ease of manner. To all the amiable and encouraging words of this young page Gargantua can find no reply, 'but all the countenance that he kept was, that he fell to crying like a cow, and cast down his face, hiding it in his cap'. The father is furious; in his anger he wants to kill Master Jobelin, the pedant, who has produced such poor educational results; but he is

content with turning him out of doors, and entrusting Gargantua to the same tutor who has taught Eudemone so well, and whose name is Ponocrates.

Here we touch upon one of the parts of Rabelais' book which contain great good sense and, to a certain point, a serious sense. I speak with some reserve; for, whilst recognizing the serious portions, we must be on our guard against supposing and creating them, as so many commentators have done, which must give Rabelais occasions for a good laugh, if he troubles himself about us among the Shades. But in the present instance the intention is not doubtful. We have seen how Gargantua was given over to the pedagogues of the old school, and the sad results of this sordid, cut-and-dried, pedantic and altogether besotting education, the last legacy of the expiring Middle Age. Ponocrates, on the contrary, is an innovator, a modern, according to the true Renaissance. He takes his pupil with him to Paris, and applies himself to forming his character and morals.

But what merry pranks as they proceed! What adventures on the way and on entering Paris! what a reception Gargantua has from the too curious and ever agape Parisians! and what a welcome he pays them in return! Read all these things, these gigantic, indecent schoolboy tricks, which are turned into excellent comedy scenes: I will take refuge in the semi-serious portions.

Ponocrates begins by testing his pupil; he anticipates Montaigne's method, who holds that we should *first make the young mind trot* before us to judge of its pace. Ponocrates therefore allows young Gargantua to follow for a time his customary train of life, and Rabelais gives us a description of this routine of idleness, gluttony and sloth, the result of a badly directed first education. I will sum up this education in a sentence: young Gargantua already conducts himself like the most slothful and gluttonous monks of the time, waking late and lying in bed in the morning, starting the day with a copious breakfast, attending numerous Masses which do not fatigue him much, and altogether devoted to the pleasures of the stomach, to sleep and idleness. On reading these descriptions, how well we can imagine the disgust Rabelais must have felt for the ignoble life he led as a Cordelier!

It is high time to reform this vicious education; but

Ponocrates is a wise man and does not make the transition too abrupt, 'considering that Nature cannot endure sudden changes without great violence'. These chapters XXIII and XXIV of the First Book are truly admirable, and offer the soundest and vastest system of education that can be imagined, a more carefully-arranged system than that of the *Émile*, a system *à la Montaigne*, quite practical, aiming at utility, at the development of the whole man, of both his bodily and mental faculties. At each step we recognize the enlightened Physician, the Physiologist, the Philosopher.

Gargantua wakes about four o'clock in the morning; during his first toilet a few pages of Holy Scripture are read to him, in a loud and clear voice, in order that at the beginning of the day his spirit may be lifted up to the works and judgments of God. Then follow several details of hygiene, for the physician in Rabelais neglects nothing. After which the tutor takes the pupil and shows him the state of the heavens, which they had already observed the night before, before going to bed; he points out to him the different positions, the changes of the constellations and stars, for Rabelais the astronomer, who has published Almanacs, is not less able than Rabelais the physician, and holds no science, no human and natural knowledge to be irrelevant.

In respect of the physical knowledge of the heavens, we have profited very little in education since Rabelais' time. Though we have had Newton, and though M. Arago has given the signal in his Lectures at the Observatory, every-day teaching has gained nothing. Though we should blush to be ignorant of geography and its principal divisions, we have only to raise our eyes to the sky to see that we are almost totally ignorant of that sublime cosmography, which it would require only a few evenings and a demonstrator to teach us. Ponocrates would have blushed to see his pupil so ignorant of a spectacle so majestic and so habitual.

After this little open-air lesson come the lessons within doors, *three good hours* of reading; then games, ball, tennis, everything that serves to 'gallantly exercise the body, as they had before exercised the mind'. It is this mixture and this just balance which characterises the true and complete education, according to Rabelais:

we see the physician in every precept, the man who knows the relations between the physical and the moral, who in everything consults nature.

At table, at what was then called dinner (what we should call breakfast), the master allows his pupil to eat only so much as is necessary to appease *the barkings of the stomach*; this dinner, this first meal, is to be *sober and frugal*, an ampler and more copious supper being reserved for the evening. During this morning repast each dish suggests a discourse on the virtues, properties and nature of the ingredients, meat, fish, herbs and roots. Passages from the ancient writers are recalled; if necessary, books are fetched; unconsciously the pupil becomes as learned as a Pliny, 'and there was not a physician then who knew the half of what he did'.

After the repast come cards, not to play, but again to learn by their means a thousand pretty tricks and new inventions, all grounded upon arithmetic and numbers. Thus the young Gargantua has his *mathematical recreations* in play.

Digestion over, and after several more hygienic attentions, which I pass over in silence, but which Rabelais never takes for granted, they resume their studies a second time, *for three hours or more*, after which, about two or three o'clock of the afternoon, they leave the mansion, and go in company with Gymnast, the riding-master, to practise the art of riding and gymnastics. Under so skilful a master Gargantua makes brave progress. He does not amuse himself with breaking lances, 'for it is the greatest foolery in the world, remarks Rabelais, to say: *I have broken ten lances in tilts or in combat*; a carpenter could do as much; but it would be a glorious and praiseworthy action to break ten of one's enemies with one lance'. Is it not evident that good sense is already taking the place of a false point of honour, and that this Rabelais, who does nothing from vainglory or bluster, will henceforth correct the last of the Bayards? They will correct themselves only too well.

Here, in his description of the various exercises, riding, hunting, wrestling, swimming, Rabelais is trifling: these feats of strength of Master Gymnast become, under his pen, feats of language. French prose is also passing through its course of gymnastics, and the style appears

prodigious in its abundance, its freedom, its flexibility, its propriety, as well as its spirit. Never before had there been such a feast of language.

It is truly admirable as an ideal table of education, which becomes almost entirely serious, if reduced from its gigantic, Gargantuan proportions to more human ones. Taking it all round, there is no doubt excess and exaggeration; but it is an exaggeration that is easily brought back to the true, and into the right road of human nature. The quite novel character of this education lies in the mingling of play and study, in making every matter serve as a subject of careful instruction, in making books and the things of life, theory and practice, the body and the mind, music and gymnastics, go hand in hand, as with the Greeks, but without idolatrously taking the past for one's model, and having constant regard to the present and the future.

On rainy days the hours are differently employed, and the diet also differs. Fewer exercises being taken in the open air, they observe a greater sobriety in feeding. On these days too they make a point of visiting the shops and workrooms of the different artisans and tradesmen, lapidaries, goldsmiths, alchemists, money-coiners, watch-makers, printers, not forgetting the then quite new art of casting guns, and, everywhere 'giving money for wine', they learn the different industries. It is remarkable, this desire of Rabelais, that his royal pupil shall become curious about all new things, every modern invention, in order that he may never be embarrassed or amazed, like so many petty scholars who have no knowledge of anything but books. This education according to Poncecrates reconciles both the Ancients and the Moderns. Perault, the innovator, the worthy clerk of Colbert, would find nothing wanting, and Madame Dacier, the worshipper of Homer, would also have been satisfied.

In this course of education and study for the use of the young Gargantua we have the first model of what has been since more seriously, but not more sensibly, presented by Montaigne, Charron, and partially by the School of Port-Royal, that Christian School which did not know how far it was following in the footsteps of Rabelais; a strange precursor! Here is anticipated, from the point of view and with the gaiety of a genius, what was after-

wards expanded to a system by Jean-Jacques in his *Émile*, and to insipidity by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in his *Études de la Nature*.

The latter, however, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, whose chaste, ideal, often dreamy and melancholy talent seems least in harmony with the spirit of Rabelais, wonderfully grasped the serious side we have indicated, and in a memorable, not altogether chimerical, passage, though too simple in colour and too embellished, said of him :

'It was all over with the happiness of the peoples, and even with religion, when two men of letters, Rabelais and Miguel Cervantes, rose up, the one in France, the other in Spain, and shook both the powers of monasticism and chivalry. To overthrow these two giants, they employed no other arms than ridicule, that natural contrast to human terror. (*What more correct and happy definition could be found?*) Like children, the peoples laughed and were reassured. They had no other incentives to happiness than those which their Princes were willing to give them, if their Princes had been capable of giving any. The *Télémaque* appeared, and this book recalled Europe to the harmonies of nature. It produced a great revolution in politics. . . .'

I will not be so bold as to accept this manner of explaining modern history, and to refer its principal event to two or three names, to two or three books. In the intervals between the *Gargantua*, *Don Quixote* and *Télémaque* more things had happened than Bernardin de Saint-Pierre appears to suspect. There is truth however in this way of looking at Rabelais, the frank jester, as having comforted and reassured the human race on its emerging from the terrors of the Middle Age and the labyrinth of scholasticism.

This plan of education which I admire in Rabelais, in Montaigne, in Charron and several of their successors, had a great opportunity when it came to emancipating the young generation, to delivering them from slavish and oppressive methods, and leading their minds back to natural ways. Even now, after three centuries, much still remains to be done, in order to realize this programme. It must be remembered, however, that these new, and above all pleasant methods, of imparting knowledge to children by means of a tutor or governor for each, take no account of the inherent difficulties of public education,

and those which depend on the order of society itself. In the latter, indeed, and more and more as one advances in life, what fatigues, what struggles and pains one has to overcome! It is no bad thing to become inured to them long beforehand through education, to have to feel the weight of things early in life. A philosopher of the eighteenth century, more sensible than Jean-Jacques, (Galiani), recommends two points especially in education : to teach children to bear injustice ; to teach them to bear tedium.

But all that Rabelais wished to do was, to utter, in the form of a huge laugh, a few very sensible and very appropriate ideas, which were in advance of his day : do not demand more of him. There is something of everything in his book, and every admirer may flatter himself that he has discovered therein what is most analogous to his own mind. But here are also enough humorous and frankly amusing parts to justify his renown and glory in the eyes of all. The rest is debatable, equivocal, subject to controversy and comment. Readers who are sincere in their admiration confess that they find it difficult to take a pleasure in these passages, and even to listen to them. What is admirable without any doubt, is the form of the language, the abundance and wealth of expression, the plentiful and inexhaustible flow of words. His French no doubt, in spite of his mockeries at the expense of the *Latinizers* and *Grecizers* of the time, is still well filled and as it were stuffed with the ancient languages ; but in his case the nourishment has been, so to speak, from within, and does not appear foreign to him, so that in his mouth everything assumes the ease of naturalness, of familiarity and genius. In him, as in Aristophanes, though more rarely, we might pick out the pure, charming, lucid and really poetic parts. Here is one of these passages, for example, which is full of grace and beauty. In one of Lucian's Dialogues, between Venus and Cupid, the goddess asks her son why he respects the Muses so much, and the child's reply has been amplified and embellished by Rabelais in these terms :

‘ And I remember having read that Cupid, when questioned several times by his mother why he did not attack the Muses, replied that he found them so fair, so neat, so chaste, so modest, and so continually occupied, one in the contemplation of the

stars, another in the computation of numbers, another in the measurement of geometrical bodies, another in rhetorical invention, another in poetical composition, another in the arrangement of music, that, on approaching them, he unbent his bow, closed his quiver and extinguished his torch, in shame and fear of hurting them. Then he removed the bandage from his eyes, that he might more openly look in their faces, and hear their pleasant songs and poetic odes. Therein he took the greatest pleasure in the world, so that often he felt quite charmed by their beauty and good graces, and went to sleep in the harmony. . . .

That is Rabelais, on the days when he remembers Lucian, or better still, Plato.

No author has been more admired than Rabelais, but he has been admired in two ways, and, we may say, by two races, very distinct in mind and in the manner of their admiration. The one class admire him, but they like him even more than they admire him; they read him, understand him where they can, and make up for what they do not understand by relishing the more the exquisite portions, which they extract like the marrow from a bone. This manner of admiring Rabelais is Montaigne's, who ranks his book among those which are *simply amusing*; it is the manner of the whole seventeenth century, of Racine and La Fontaine, who naïvely asked a Doctor who was speaking of St. Augustine whether this great Saint had as much wit as Rabelais. There is another manner of admiring Rabelais, which consists in trying to make him out to be a man of one's own party, in dragging him over to one's own side and exhibiting him, as Ginguéné did in a pamphlet, as one of the precursors and apostles of the Revolution of 1789 and those which followed. This last manner, which piques itself on being much more philosophical and logical, appears to me much less Rabelaisian ¹.

The young author of the pamphlet I spoke of at the beginning of this *Causerie*, M. Eugène Noël, follows a little this latter method, applying it in accordance with the ideas and limitations of our time, that is to say, by exaggerating it still more. He has thus, by introducing a

¹ The like has been done for Molière, and Camille Desmoulins said in *Le Vieux Cordelier*: 'In the *Misanthrope* Molière has painted in sublime lines the characters of the *Republican* and the *Royalist*: Alceste is a *Jacobin* and Philinte a finished *Fouillant*'.

system, managed to spoil a study which is in other respects estimable, showing evidence of much reading and a sufficiently intimate acquaintance with his subject. M. Michelet, keeping up his war against the Middle Ages, in which he still, after three centuries, sees a menacing danger, one day commenced his lecture at the Collège de France with these words: 'God is like a mother, who loves to see her son strong and proud, and able to resist her; so his favourites are those robust and undaunted natures who wrestle with him like Jacob, the strongest and most cunning of shepherds. Voltaire and Rabelais are his chosen ones'. The Rabelais of M. Michelet, who pleases God by wrestling with him, is to some extent the Rabelais of M. Eugène Noël: 'He dragged, says this biographer, the men of his time out of the darkness, out of the terrible fastings of the old world . . . His book, quite paternal, responded to that universal cry of thirst of the sixteenth century: *Drink for the people!* . . . That great river of the Papal Church, from which the Middle Age had drunk so long, was dried up. *Drink! Drink!* was the universal cry, and so it was the first word of Gargantua . . .' Here is an allegorical thirst with a novel explanation, which the commentators had not yet dreamed of.

Every age has its hobby-horse; our age, which is not addicted to jesting, has the humanitarian hobby-horse, and thinks it is doing a great honour to Rabelais in ascribing the same to him.

I imagine that when any party try to draw Rabelais over to their side, he submits with a good grace, but that he laughs at them. He must be surprised on the present occasion to find that, in legendary form, he has become an apostle, a saint, a future Gospel Christ. Speaking of the manner in which he carried out his duties as *Curé* of Meudon, and persisting in this mode of symbolical explanation, the new biographer exclaims:

'How I should have wished to hear him! how I should have loved to be present when he was reading Mass, on some fine Easter Sunday, and contemplate his majestic and serene countenance, when, hearing the congregation around him singing: *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum* (*Like as the hart panteth after the water brooks*), he thought again with a divine smile of satisfaction of that infinite *thirst* of his Pantagruel'!

Let us return to good sense and moderation, and make an end of it ; Voltaire will help us. He began, in his youth, by having very little liking for Rabelais. He relates how one day the Duke of Orleans, the Regent, talking with him as they left the Opera, began to praise Rabelais very highly : ' I thought him a Prince who kept bad company, he said, whose taste was corrupt. At that time I had a sovereign contempt for Rabelais '. In his *Philosophic Letters* he speaks indeed very slightly of him, ranking him below Swift, which is not just : ' He was a drunken philosopher, he concludes, who only wrote when he was drunk '. But twenty years later he makes amends, writing to Madame Du Deffand :

' I have read again, after *Clarisse*, a few chapters of Rabelais, among others the Battle of Friar Jean des Entomeures and the description of Picrochole's Council of War ; I know them almost by heart, but have read them again with very great pleasure, because it is as true to life as any picture can be. Not that I place Rabelais beside Horace . . . Rabelais, when he is good, is the first of good jesters : a nation does not need two men of this trade, but it must have one. I repent of having once spoken ill of him '.

Yes, Rabelais is a jester, but a unique jester, a Homeric jester ! This latter judgment of Voltaire will remain that of all men of good sense and taste, of those who have not, however, a decided vocation and a particular predilection for Rabelais. But, for the others, for the true *amateurs*, for the real Pantagruelian devotees, Rabelais is a very different thing, and there is at the bottom of Master François' cask, and even in his dregs, I know not what flavour they prefer to anything else. As for ourselves, if we are permitted to have an opinion on so solemn a question, it seems to us that what they relish in his good parts, and with the pleasure associated with a certain illicit mystery, they will find, of the same quality and quite openly, in Molière.

I have sometimes wondered what Molière might have been, if he had been a learned scholar, decked out with Latin and Greek, a physician (Molière a physician ! can you imagine the miracle ?), and a priest after having been a monk, Molière living in an age when every liberal mind had to be on its guard against the stakes of Geneva as well as those of the Sorbonne, Molière in short without a

stage, and forced to wrap up his excellent humour and drown it in torrents of nonsense, of cock-and-bull stories and drunkards' talk, every now and then covering a laugh which attacks society in a vital point, by following it up with a purposeless laugh ; and it occurred to me that we should then have something very nearly approaching to Rabelais. However, there will always remain peculiar to the latter the singular attraction which is the result of certain difficulties overcome, and of a sort of free-masonry of a bacchic and scholarly kind, which the lover of Rabelais feels himself to belong to. In the pure Pantagruelian there is, in a word, an air of initiation, which is always flattering.

MADAME DE GENLIS ¹

Monday, October 14, 1850.

OF obsolete names that of Mme de Genlis is one of the most cited, one of the most familiar to the ear, and one that calls up, I think, the least distinct idea in the minds of the newer generations. Her reputation has preserved something equivocal and ill-defined. The diversity of her works and of her conduct, the politics in which she dabbled, the satires, the malicious accusations by which she was pursued and in which she herself perhaps indulged on more than one occasion, did not contribute, even in her life-time, to make her physiognomy very distinct to those who only saw her from a distance. Now that it is permissible, at this distance of time, to extricate her features, and show them up more strongly and even crudely, I will try to render the impression I have received after reperusal of the principal writings of this lady-author, for we should be bold to claim to have read them all.

A lady-author, that is what Mme de Genlis was indeed before anything, and nature seemed to have created her such, as if that were henceforth one of the essential functions of civilization and life : Mme de Genlis would certainly have invented writing materials, if they had not been invented already. But, though she was a lady-author like so many others and more than any other, she was so in a manner of her own, which characterizes her. Agreeable and brilliant in her young years, she did not confine herself to a single taste, to a single accomplishment ; she courted them all and really mastered some. All these different tastes and talents, all these pleasing accomplishments, all these crafts (for she did not even neglect the crafts), made her a living Encyclopedia which piqued itself on being the rival and antagonist

¹ *Works of Madame de Genlis* (Collection Didier.)

of the other Encyclopedia ; but what gave life and movement to this mass of occupations was a vocation which embraced them, which disposed and applied them in a certain definite direction. Mme de Genlis was something more than a lady-author, she was a *teaching* lady ; she was born with the mark on her brow. The good God has said to some : *Sing* ; to others : *Preach*. To her he had said : ' *Profess and teach.*' Never were the words of the apostle more positively belied : '*Docere autem mulieri non permitto*,—I suffer not a woman to teach,' as Saint Paul said to Timothy. Mme de Genlis was not free to obey this precept, though she had wished to do so, so strong and irresistible was her calling even at an early age. From childhood she manifested the instinct and enthusiasm for *pedagogy*, using the word in its best sense. It had been ordained, at her birth, that she should be the most engaging and gallant of pedagogues.

We see a proof of this if we peruse her voluminous *Memoirs*, in which, whilst trying to disguise no doubt and attenuate many things, she has disclosed many others. What matters to us after all such or such a circumstance in her life, if the features of her character declare themselves ?

Mme de Genlis (Mlle Félicité Du Crest de Saint-Aubin), born on January 25, 1746, of a noble family of Burgundy, spent her early years partly in Paris, but chiefly in the provinces. Having been admitted at the age of six as a canoness into the noble Chapter of Alix near Lyons, she was styled Madame la Comtesse de Lancy, after the name of the town of Bourbon-Lancy, of which her father was lord. Brought up at the Château of Saint-Aubin, under her mother's wing, with a governess who was a good musician, she began by reading *Celtie* and plays. As soon as she knew anything, her first need was to teach and become a schoolmistress ; she picked up her pupils wherever she could. When she was barely seven years of age, having espied, from a terrace near her room, some village children who came to cut reeds beside a pond, she bethought herself of giving them lessons and teaching them what she knew herself, the Catechism, a few lines out of some wretched tragedies by a certain Mlle Barbier, and music. From her terrace, which formed a

sort of balcony, she taught them in the most solemn manner. As she was then she will be to the end of her days, incessantly in need of somebody beside her to instruct and discipline—little villagers, for want of better, or perhaps the daughter of a milk-woman. The latter, a child of ten, she one day decided to teach the harp; but the harp is too heavy and; after six months, the mistress perceives that the child is becoming deformed; seeing which, she corrects her figure by means of stays and a sheet of lead which are sent from Paris. Thus, the harp having failed in this case, Mme de Genlis practises orthopedy: it matters little to her, provided that she can lecture and correct, and follow her propensity to teach. To that end she turns everything to account. So in later years, when writing, she never loses an opportunity to bring in a precept or a prescription, whether of morality or medicine.

A calling of that nature appeared to indicate severe tastes; but in her case the calling contrives very effectually to combine with romantic tastes, and that is another trait, and a most essential one, in the character of Mme de Genlis. This child, who began by reading *Clélie*, and who will ever remember it, acts plays from her earliest years, and henceforth everything in her imagination, even teaching, tends to assume that theatrical form. Mme de Genlis' mother, who was able to write poetry of a sort (the primary gift of every member of this family was *facility*), had composed a comic opera which was performed at Saint-Aubin, and in which the little Comtesse de Lancy (the future Genlis) played the part of Cupid:

'I shall never forget, she says, that in the Prologue my costume as *Cupid* was pink, covered with point lace studded over with little artificial flowers of many colours; it reached only to my knees; I wore little straw-coloured and silver boots, my long hair down my back and blue wings'.

She played so well, she was such a success, that they allowed her to wear this *Cupid's* dress for months. In this attire (provided with bow, quiver and wings) she went about the country. On Sundays only, when she went to church, the wings were removed. So she was artificial and unreal on working days as well as on Sun-

days. It became her habit from that time to turn everything into romance and to get to the truth of nothing. Later, having played a man's part in a play of *La Chaussée*, she discarded the *Cupid's* dress, only to assume a charming suit of male attire which had been made for her, and which she did not give up until her departure from Burgundy. We see that she only left off one disguise to take up another, and that nature in her was always masked and travestied. These early impressions left long traces in an imagination which had not sufficient originality and native strength to resist and correct them; to a certain extent they passed into her systems of education, which always had a tendency to assume a theatrical form. In her old age, the satisfaction with which she began to recount and describe all these romantic puerilities, though appearing to smile at them, proves on the contrary that she was never cured.

Thank Heaven, we are not writing her life; that would be too delicate, too perilous a task. Having come to Paris to settle, at the age of about twelve or thirteen (1758), in consequence of a reverse of fortune, she made her *début* there in the character of an infant prodigy and a rare virtuoso: bagpipe, harpsichord, viola, mandoline, guitar, she played them all with wonderful skill, but the harp was her favourite instrument. The method of playing it was still in its infancy: Mme de Genlis, with her facility and natural cleverness, improved and perfected the fingering. After that we see her endowed with that methodic activity which allows no particle of time to escape without making it pay tribute, and which turns everything to account as an object of study, for the acquisition of an extensive and superficial knowledge. Needlework, intellectual labours, learning by heart of poetry and prose, recording every anecdote and society adventure, which will soon form the matter of a comedy or tale, and withal seven or eight hours a day devoted to the harp, she is equal to it all, and to the task of amusing and charming a company of admirers. Whatever definitive opinion one may have formed of her, one will agree that at that age she must have been a fascinating child; the faults only show themselves as such at a later period, youth covers everything, and, since with Mme de Genlis we are in an atmosphere of mythology, I may

say: Youth lends to our faults wings which prevent their being too heavy and oppressive.

She is married to the Comte de Genlis, the Sillery who afterwards died on the scaffold with the Girondists, and who appears to have been an agreeable man of wit. Marriage does not interrupt Mme de Genlis' studies; it only widens and varies them. At the Château of Genlis, where she spends a season, she always finds time for acting plays, for music, for keeping a *Diary* of all that is seen or said at the Château, for reading Pascal, Corneille and Mme de Sévigné, for revising her osteology (she had already learned osteology) with a local surgeon, for learning phlebotomy besides. She practises popular medicine in the village, with Tissot's book in one hand and a lancet in the other to bleed any peasant who may present himself: and as she gave them thirty sous after every blood-letting, there was no lack of patients. These manifold tasks by no means absorb all her time: she rides with an officer of fortune who happens to be in the neighbourhood, and becomes quite a skilful horsewoman; she takes part in long boar-hunts and is in danger on several occasions. You will think that I am joking, but let her speak for herself; no one can describe a man better than himself, if he is a good writer and speaker.

'This new passion, she says of her taste for horse exercise, did not cause me to neglect either my music or my studies. M. de Sauvigny (*a witty and not too mediocre littérateur of the time*) directed my reading: I made extracts; I had found in the offices a large folio intended for the kitchen accounts; this I took possession of and kept in it a very detailed *journal* of my occupations and reflections, with the intention of giving it to my mother when it was full. I wrote a few lines every day, and sometimes whole pages. Without neglecting any branch of instruction, I tried to make myself acquainted with the labours of the field and the garden; I went to see how cider is made; I went to see all the artisans of the village at their work, the joiner, the weaver, the basket-maker, etc. I learned to play billiards and a few card games, piquet, reversi, etc. M. de Genlis could make perfect pen and ink drawings of figures and landscapes; I commenced to draw and paint flowers. I wrote many letters: every day to my mother, three times a week to Mme de Montesson, sometimes to Mme de Bellevau, and rather frequently to Mme de Balincour. I had besides a very regular correspondence with a lady I had seen at —, etc., etc.'

I must stop to take breath ; you may see that I do not exaggerate : there was never a more determined *pen-driver* than Mme de Genlis ; she presents a type of the race, but without being in any way exclusive ; the inkstand is but one of her instruments. She can do everything and knows how everything is done ; she understands the making of cider as she does the harp. She wants to qualify herself for every trade, so that people may say of her as of Gil Blas : ' You have the universal tool '. Nobody ever had in a smaller degree that *modesty of knowledge* which Fénelon recommends to women, and which he would like to see acute and delicate, almost equal to the other forms of modesty. But remember that all that she is learning at that time she will soon transmit to others ; for, if she has a passion for learning, she has above all a mania for teaching.

• Apropos of this encyclopedic mania which possessed her at all times, and which only grew with years, one of her witty friends said : ' She is reserving for her old age the remaking of the *Encyclopædia* '.

Meanwhile, newly married and hardly pregnant, she quickly wrote a book with the title *Reflections of a Mother of twenty*, though she was not more than nineteen. The manuscript was lost ; but what she never lost was the habit of translating into a book, a novel, a lesson, everything that offered. To her everything was matter for a book or an essay.

Grace, elegance of form, great social affability, a worldly power of discerning characters, and a talent for getting into the good graces of others, a universal tint of *sentiment* which coloured and disguised her pedantry, those were her charms in her younger years. Having entered the Palais-Royal as one of the ladies of the Duchesse de Chartres (mother of Louis-Philippe), she had a great success there, exciting admiration and envy, and becoming a kind of centre. She soon contracted a real friendship with the young and affable princess, and it was decided between them that she should become the governess of her daughters, and that (contrary to custom) from the cradle up. After a few years passed at the Palais-Royal, at the age of thirty-one (1777), Mme de Genlis went into retirement with a certain éclat ; she solemnly left off rouge (which was a great sign at that time), and went to inhabit a little

pavilion in the Convent of Belle-Chasse which she had had built and where she established herself with her pupils. But her condition was not quite complete until, a little time afterwards (1781), the Duc de Chartres, who was not less under the charm, had conferred upon her the function and title of *governor* of his sons. That was a great moment in the life of Mme de Genlis: 'I saw, she said, the possibility of an extraordinary and glorious thing, and I desired it to come to pass'. In this exclamation we may recognize the *romancer* even in the joy of the governor. Mme de Genlis had found her ideal. She had at last reached the pinnacle of her wishes; she was about to swim in the plenitude of her vocation. She had the chance of educating, as she understood the word, not only young girls, but youths and princes, one of whom became king. Here it is really curious to observe her, and here we must render her the justice which is her due. ■

Here however we should be too incomplete if we said nothing about the epigrams which from this moment began to assail her. Most of them are not of a nature to be reproduced, but there are some which we may be permitted to recall. Imagine that at this epoch, by virtue of a sort of attraction which drew together the flower of pedants of both sexes, La Harpe fell in love with her: it makes one believe in the influence of the stars. Mme de Genlis tells us that the little man tried to be bold, but that she made him remember his place: in these things we must always believe a woman, even when she does not tell them, and with the greater reason when she does. However, La Harpe the critic was seriously in love. In his *Correspondence* at the time he speaks of Mme de Genlis as 'perhaps the wiftest woman in Paris'. He cannot find sufficient words to praise the little plays of her *Théâtre d'Éducation* or her *Théâtre de Société*, which were written at this period to be acted by her own daughters: little moral comedies with no male parts and no love plots. La Harpe, who finds prose inadequate to vent his enthusiasm, exclaims in verse:

Ton art, belle Genlis, l'emportant sur le nôtre,
Ne fait parler qu'un sexe et charme l'un et l'autre.

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Quel ensemble enchanteur ! quel spectacle charmant !
Mon cœur est encor plein du plus pur sentiment.

Digne mère, jouis, jouis de ces délices.
Ton âme et tes talents, voilà tes justes droits !
Dans toi seule aujourd'hui l'on adore à la fois
L'auteur, l'ouvrage et les actrices !

Thus far did passion carry the critic *en titre*, the man of taste of the period. The scoffers, the critic's enemies (and there was no lack of them), the enviers of the clever and versatile *governor*, made merry over the incident, as one may well believe ; there was no end to the epigrams, and the name La Harpe, which was singularly appropriate to Mme de Genlis' talent for playing the *harp* (*la harpe*), lent itself to endless puns.

La Harpe, by the way, paid dearly for this short favour ; he quarrelled with Mme de Genlis, who put him, under the name of *Damoville*, into a satiric tale which attacked all the philosopher-writers of the time, and in which she avenged herself on the Academy for not having crowned any of her works : it was a little way of hers to translate people into her books when she fell out with them.

One day Mme de Genlis was attending, with her pupils, a performance of *Les Femmes savantes* at the Théâtre Français. On hearing these two lines :

Elles veulent écrire et devenir auteurs. . . ,
Et céans, beaucoup plus qu'en aucun lieu du monde,

the audience, it is said, looked at her and applauded.

Let us return to seriousness, and in presence of this mass of works, of treatises and novels, which would fill not less than a hundred volumes, let us try to fix our point of view and simplify it. We may distinguish in Mme de Genlis the writer *four* periods, for she lived eighty-four years, and died at the end of October, 1830, late enough to have seen her pupil Louis-Philippe on the throne.

1. Her first literature, the works published under Louis XVI, before '89, all have a direct relation to education : the *Théâtre d'Éducation* properly so-called (1779) ; *Adèle et Théodore* (1782) ; *Les Veillées du Château* (1784), etc., etc. These works, remarkable for a facile

interest, some delicate observations and society portraits, a clear and fluent style, and some correct precepts of detail, are all more or less spoiled by a romantic tone, by a factitious sentimentality, by their theatrical machinery; and, in their first form, they have had their day. They could not henceforth be reintroduced for educational purposes without revision and correction.

2. When the Revolution of '89 burst out, Mme de Genlis did not at first show herself opposed to it; she followed or perhaps even excited the ambitions of the Duke of Orleans, and openly quarrelled with the Duchess. She published, in a constitutional direction, some *Counsels on the Education of the Dauphin*, and was not afraid of printing, with the title *Lessons of a Governess* (1791), a portion of her confidential Journals which related to the education of the children of Orleans, seasoning the whole work with patriotic reflections in the order of the day. I will return presently to these *Lessons*, where we shall find reflected in a natural way the whole childhood and youth of King Louis-Philippe and his sister.

3. After her departure from France and her travels in foreign countries, Mme de Genlis, having returned during the time of the Consulate, published, between 1802 and 1813, some works which flow from her sentimental and romantic rather than from her pedagogic vein, and several of which gained a real success: the *Souvenirs de Félicie*, a first pleasing sketch, which was afterwards spun out in her interminable *Memoirs*; a tale which is regarded as her masterpiece, *Mademoiselle de Clermont*, and a few historical novels, *La Duchesse de La Vallière*, *Madame de Maintenon*, *Mademoiselle de La Fayette*: that was her best period.

4. Lastly, under the Restoration, Mme de Genlis did not discontinue writing; but her writings of that time, too facile productions of a pen that was never held in check, and which abandoned itself more than ever to its repetitions, reproduce, with exaggeration, all the defects of her mind and her manner. The common elegance of the form no longer hides the insipidity of the substance, and a few delicate observations hardly float on the surface of a flood of words. Add to this that she becomes more and more a *Mother of the Church*, and poses as a mortal adversary of Voltaire.

In order to be just to Mme de Genlis, we must limit ourselves and consider her only in her principal works. I will therefore say something of her education of Louis-Philippe and of her tale of *Mademoiselle de Clermont*, that is to say, of the best that Mme de Genlis produced as a page of history and a page of fiction.

The manner in which she conceived and directed, from the very first day, the education of the children of Orleans is extremely remarkable, and denotes in the teacher a more practical sense of reality than her books alone would seem to indicate. She started them without delay in living languages, in the usual branches of knowledge, in the matters of the body and the mind, carrying on the whole simultaneously. For example, in the summer at Saint-Leu, her pupils had each their little garden, which they cultivated themselves, and the gardener who directed their operations spoke only German with them. But if they gardened in *German*, they dined in *English* and supped in *Italian*; French was spoken sufficiently in the intervals. When they went out walking, an apothecary-botanist accompanied the young princes to teach them their plants. A Pole, a clever draughtsman, had painted for them Sacred History, Ancient History, the History of China and Japan: all these historical pictures formed an entertaining and instructive set of *magic lantern* slides. As she was unable to deny herself the satisfaction of her dramatic tastes, she contrived to put in action and make her pupils play in the garden, where the artificial scenery combined with nature, the principal scenes of the Abbé Prévost's *Travels*, abridged by La Harpe, and in general all sorts of historical and mythological subjects. She likewise invented for them quite a series of gymnastic exercises, till then unknown: the exercises of the *pullies*, of the *back-baskets*, of the *wooden beds*, of the *leaden shoes*; she was afterwards able with good reason to congratulate herself on having taught her principal pupil 'to look after himself, to despise every kind of effeminacy, to sleep habitually on a wooden bed, covered with nothing but an esparto-mat; to defy sunshine, rain and cold; to inure himself to fatigue, by going daily through his violent exercises and walking four or five leagues with leaden soles'. In a word, in the whole of this part of her career, she showed herself ingenious, inventive, most ener-

getic and apropos : she had truly found full scope for her occupation and genius.

She simultaneously trained several pupils, Monsieur de Valois (Louis-Philippe), his brothers, Monsieur de Montpensier and Monsieur de Beaujolais, and their sister (Madame Adelaïde) ; with them she had associated a nephew of her own, and a niece, not to mention that adoptive daughter, the celebrated and interesting *Paméla* (that romantic name was chosen by Mme de Genlis). It is interesting to read the judgment she forms of the mind of the future king, then eight years of age, who was in her hands until he was seventeen : ' He had a natural good sense which struck me from the very first ; he loved to reason as other children love frivolous tales '. Add to that a spirit of order and an astonishing memory. It transpires however from the notes of this educational journal that Monsieur de Montpensier had more natural distinction, something more refined, and that he thought that his elder brother took things a little too straightforwardly ; he told him so more than once with the familiarity of a comrade and a brother. To compose a true portrait of Louis-Philippe, we should have to take him as he reveals himself at the time of this early education and in the extract of a journal of his which has been published (1790-1), and which is a natural result of it. There we should see him already outlined as he appeared on the throne. Monsieur de Valois (as he was then called) gave no promise of the flower of the old Valois, that supreme distinction in taste, which is not always in harmony with good sense and a practical knowledge of life. He learns everything, he retains everything, he will reason well on any subject ; but he is not one of those who have a natural feeling for music, for poetry, for the fine arts, or for fine literature ; notwithstanding which he had at an early age, through the careful training of his governess, seen, handled and practised them sufficiently to be a confident judge of them. *I could do as much*, he might have said of almost every production of those arts that was offered to his consideration. She had made him learn, in fact, and manipulate from his childhood, so many different things, that there was hardly any branch of knowledge or the arts in which he could not think himself one of the profession, and instruct anybody

in them on occasion : he made this only too evident when he became king.

I am not entitled to express any personal judgment upon a prince whom the French, with their natural versatility, are just now exalting and magnifying, after having cast him down ; only I know that one day, during five short minutes, three Academicians were admitted into his presence, and that he found an opportunity of telling them the date of the foundation of the Accademia della Crusca, which none of the three knew ; and he was not sorry to tell them. There we see the old pupil of Mme de Genlis.

Here I touch upon one of the slight drawbacks of a system of education that goes to excess in storing the mind. Another drawback is that it does not leave the young minds that are subjected to it a single quarter of an hour in which to dream, to develop in freedom, to give birth to an original idea or a natural flower that would fain see the light.

Another and last drawback may be added touching as a whole this quite modern education, when it is not counterbalanced : the feeling for antiquity, the moral and literary genius which is its glory, the lofty ideal that it supposes, is entirely absent ; its existence is not even suspected. Oh ! how different from the education *à la Ponocrates*, the education *à la Rabelais* (with all deference to those who are offended by it !), of which I spoke in my last article, and which embraced the two terms of art and human admiration !

But the advantages were real and positive, and were soon brought out by adversity. Mme de Genlis has been often and deservedly blamed for her conduct during the Revolution, for the intrigues in which she was concerned and which she vainly tried to palliate in some dishonest apologies ; but what cannot be denied is her strong friendship, and a sort of motherliness for her pupils, for Mademoiselle d'Orléans in particular (Madame Adelaïde), whom she took with her to Switzerland in '93, and from whom she only parted in the last extremity. At this time the young Duke of Orleans was beginning to be emancipated from his absolute submission to the ideas of his governor. His good sense, left to itself, found its freedom in the light of experience ; he could see through

the clever and crafty woman who had been so deeply mixed up with the misfortunes of his house. Some curious letters of Mme de Flahaut, written from Bremgarten in Switzerland (January and February, 1795), testify to the true state of the Prince's feeling at this epoch, and of the sudden vehemence of his first reaction against Mme de Genlis. This anger died down since then. However the impress of such an education survived every other influence; and, to sum up, in order to obtain a right knowledge of Louis-Philippe the man and the essential qualities of his mind and his nature, we must, I repeat, go back to the beginning and consider him under the prolonged tutelage of Mme de Genlis. She literally nursed and formed him; she early formed a correct judgment of his character, and in this first judgment we find, we divine all the qualities and the *limits* that the life of this prince manifested since. He became indeed the man and the king that his nature at that time and his education, so singular for a prince, foretold.

In reviewing the works of Mme de Genlis, it seems to me that Louis-Philippe for his part is truly historic, the only work by reason of which she will continue to deserve any serious attention. As to her literary works, I will say a few words about them, although one hardly knows to-day where to stop. To be brief, let us stop at her masterpiece.

Mademoiselle de Clermont, a very short tale published in 1802, is indeed regarded as her masterpiece: for my part, I have long loved to believe that it was one, but I have just read it again, and I find it impossible not to acknowledge that its pleasing, touching, *half-good* qualities are henceforth quite out of date. I reluctantly invite those who may doubt the justice of my impression, to ascertain the fact for themselves. The first page is happy; it begins with great animation, but this is not sustained and soon turns to common-place, to an unreal sentimentalism and an unreal elegance. The authoress prides herself upon being true before everything; this truth is but another sentimental phrase. *Mademoiselle de Clermont*, a granddaughter of the great Condé, distinguishes and loves a simple nobleman, the Duc de Melun, and ends by marrying him in secret; as a princess she has to make

advances, and this situation is rather well drawn. However, everything tells us that we are in an imaginary world : these persons are melted to tears at a mere nothing ; their knees give way, they sigh, they totter without any cause ; all this lavish emotion is only in the words. The words *sentiment, sensibility, tenderness*, which recur at every page, do not really spring from the situations nor from the hearts. The matter of the *petition* which Mademoiselle de Clermont forgets for a ball and which Melun makes so good an occasion for a lesson, that important affair around which the action centres, is entirely in the style of Bouilly and Berquin. The last scene which promised so well, where Mademoiselle de Clermont insists on making her way at any cost to the wounded and dying Melun, in the end falls flat, since the princess allows herself to be turned from her purpose, and does not again see the man she loves. In this little novel, as in all the stories of this authoress, the narrative always flows along easily, but is never relieved by any vivacity of expression. It is very rare to find a novel or fresh expression in Mme de Genlis ; they are hardly to be met with except in some of her society portraits, in which she is sustained by the presence and the fidelity of her memories. It has been very rightly said of her style, as somebody said of an actress who played with more discretion than animation : She is always *good, never better*.

It would be superfluous to dwell upon a judgment which has gradually become that of all the world. In her extreme old age, and as she appeared in society since her return to France, Mme de Genlis displayed charm and amiability, but in a restricted circle. She had lost none of the activity of her mind. Her day, invariably regulated and filled in all its moments, still began with a few scales on the harp, as in her youth, and after that was divided into a thousand occupations with a persistent activity. She had preserved the need to have pupils and protégés around her, girls to whom she took a great fancy : in all things her prepossessions got the better of her judgment, and prompted her thoughts and words. Her only horizon was a society and coterie horizon. Very engaging, very fascinating when she liked, knowing everybody's strong and weak points, and skilful in throwing her snares over you, she would become cool and

indifferent as soon as you failed to respond in the same tone to her expansive demonstrations. Infinitely gracious when she liked people, her manner became hard where she did not like. Her habitual conversation was most agreeable, it is said, without any great bursts or vivid flashes, but dotted with amusing anecdotes, and very flowing and animated. What she lacked in all things was elevation of soul and talent, the truth of nature; on the other hand she had all the elegant, gracious and delicate manners of society.

We see from this ensemble view that with much wit and talent, she was by no means a superior woman. Her most real originality consisted in that calling and enthusiasm for pedagogy carried to a mania, which drew down upon her so many epigrams, but which made her at least resemble no other. Chénier, in his pretty satire *Les Nouveaux Saints*, was able to rally her on that school-mistress disposition, and riddled her with his sharpest and most penetrating shafts :

J'arrive d'Altona pour vous apprendre à lire ;
and all the rest. This is the only side of her however that has a chance of surviving. The incongruity that has been noted between her conduct and her principles, which she parades in her writings, only shows up more strongly the naturalness, the originality and, if I may say so, the sincerity of her talent for teaching. There were several persons in Mme de Genlis ; but, as soon as she took up her pen, the tone of the inner person which dominated all the others, the tone of the chief rôle took the upper hand, and she could not help writing what those who teach must keep on reiterating about religion, principles and morals. The result is that, under her pen, prudery is less hypocritical than one might think. Thus do I explain her. Her pleasure in teaching must not be considered in the light of an eccentricity, it is the very foundation and bent of her nature. Only it is a pity that, intellectual woman as she was, and a woman of principles as she professed to be, she did not succeed in reconciling that declared vocation with the feeling for the proprieties, the sense of ridicule, as well as with the rectitude and simplicity of her thoughts. You see that in speaking of her I am imitating her, and end by reading her a little moral lesson.

WHAT IS A CLASSIC ?

Monday, October 21, 1850.

A DELICATE question, of which somewhat varying solutions might have been given, according to periods and seasons. It has been propounded to me to-day by an intelligent man, and I will try, if not to solve it, to examine and to ventilate it at least before our readers, if only to induce them to reply to it themselves, and to clear up, if possible, their ideas and mine on the subject. And why should not criticism from time to time venture upon one of those non-personal subjects, and speak not of somebody but of something, as our neighbours, the English, have so successfully done in quite a branch of literature which they call by the modest name of *Essays* ? It is true that, in order to treat of such subjects, which are always rather abstract and moral, one should speak in a time of calm, one should make sure of one's own attention and that of others, and seize one of those quarters of an hour of silence, moderation and leisure which are rarely granted to our amiable France, and which her brilliant genius is impatient to bear, even when she is trying to be well-behaved and is not contemplating any revolutions.

A classic, according to the usual definition, is an ancient author, already time-honoured in admiration, and regarded as an authority in his sphere. The word *classic*, taken in this sense, first appears among the Romans. With them *classici* meant, properly speaking, not all the citizens of the different classes, but those of the first class only, who were in possession of not less than a certain determined income. All those who had a smaller income were designated *infra classem*, below the class par excellence. In a figurative sense the word *classicus* is found in Aulus Gellius, applied to writers : a writer of worth and distinction, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, a writer who counts,

who has a rank and position, and who is not confounded with the mass of the proletarians. Such an expression presupposes an age that is sufficiently advanced to make a census and a classification in literature already necessary.

For the moderns, the real, the only classics were at first naturally the ancients. The Greeks who, through a singular good fortune and as an easy relief to the intellect, had no other classics than themselves, were at first the only classics of the Romans, who spent much trouble and ingenuity in imitating them. They in their turn, after the best periods of their literature, after Cicero and Virgil, had their classics, and these became almost exclusively the classics of the succeeding ages. The Middle Age, which was not as ignorant of Latin antiquity as one might think, but lacked a sense of taste and proportion, confounded the ranks and orders: Ovid was placed on a higher level than Homer, and Boethius appeared a classic at least equal to Plato. The Renaissance of Letters, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, came to clear up this long confusion, and then only was there a graduation in the objects of admiration. The true and classical authors of the double antiquity henceforth stood out against a luminous background, and were harmoniously grouped on their two hills.

Meanwhile modern literatures were born, and some of the most precocious of them, as the Italian, already had so to say their antiquity. Dante had appeared, and his posterity had early saluted him as a classic. Italian poetry has since perhaps run in a narrower groove, but, when it has desired, it has always recovered and kept up an impetus and an echo of that lofty origin. It is not a matter of indifference for a poetry thus to have its starting-point, its classic source, in a high quarter, and, for example, to descend from Dante rather than to rise laboriously out of a Malherbe.

Modern Italy had her classics, and Spain had every right to believe that she too had hers, when France was still searching. A few writers of talent, indeed, gifted with originality and exceptional verve, a few brilliant efforts, but isolated and not followed up, immediately broken off and having to be always begun over again, are not enough to endow a nation with that solid and imposing

stock of literary wealth. The idea of *classic* implies in itself something that has sequence and stability, something that forms a whole and makes a tradition, something that is compounded, that is handed down and endures. It was only after the best years of Louis XIV that the nation felt with a thrill of pride that this good fortune had come to it. All voices then told Louis so with flattery, with exaggeration and emphasis, and yet with a certain sense of truth. Then was seen a singular and interesting contradiction: the men who were most enamoured of the wonders of that age of Louis the Great and who went so far as to sacrifice all the ancients to the moderns, the men who were led by Perrault, aimed at exalting and sanctifying the very men whom they encountered as their most ardent contradictors and their adversaries. Boileau vindicated and angrily supported the ancients against Perrault, who extolled the moderns, that is to say Corneille, Molière, Pascal, and the eminent men of his century, including Boileau among the first. The good La Fontaine, taking sides with the learned Huet in this quarrel, was not aware that he himself, in spite of his neglect, was on the eve of waking up a classic in his turn.

The best definition is an example: after France possessed her age of Louis XIV and was able to consider it from a little distance, she knew what it was to be classic, better than any reasoning could have told her. The eighteenth century even in its confusion, by reason of a few fine works due to its four great men, added to this idea. Read Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV*, Montesquieu's *Greatness and Decline of the Romans*, Buffon's *Epochs of Nature*, the *Savoyard Vicar* and the fine pages of reveries and descriptions of nature by Jean-Jacques, and say whether the eighteenth century did not succeed, in these memorable parts, in reconciling tradition with freedom of development and independence. But at the beginning of the present century and under the Empire, in presence of the first attempts of a decidedly novel and somewhat adventurous literature, the idea of a classic became, to a few refractory and ill-natured rather than severe minds, strangely narrowed and confined. The first Dictionary of the Academy (1694) defined a classic author simply as 'an ancient much approved author, who is an authority

in the matter he treats of'. The Dictionary of the Academy of 1835 greatly contracts this definition, and from being a little vague, makes it precise and even narrow. It defines classical authors as those 'who have become *models* in any language'; and, in all the articles which follow, these expressions: *models*, *rules* established for composition and style, *strict rules* of the art to which one must *conform*, continually recur. This definition of *classic* was evidently drawn up by the respectable Academicians our predecessors in presence of and with an eye upon what was then called *romantic*, that is to say, with an eye upon the enemy. It seems to me that it is time to give up these restrictive and timid definitions, and to widen the spirit of them.

A true classic, as I should like to hear him defined, is an author who has enriched the human mind, who has really increased its treasure, who has carried it a step forward, who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or again seized upon some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed to be known and explored; who has rendered his thought, his observation or his invention, under no matter what form, but large and broad, delicate and sensible, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own, which is at the same time that of all the world, in a style that is new without any neologism, new and antique, easily contemporaneous with all the ages.

The classic as here defined may have been for a moment revolutionary, he may have appeared so at least, but he is not so; if he has at first laid violent hands on things around him and overturned the obstructions in his path, he very quickly restores the balance to the advantage of order and beauty.

We may, if it is desired, set down names under this definition which I should like purposely to make grand and elastic, or, in a word, generous. I should in the first place put down the Corneille of *Polyeucte*, of *Cinna* and *Horace*. I should put down Molière, the fullest and most complete poetic genius we have had in French:

'Molière is so great, said Goethe (that king of criticism), that he astonishes us anew every time we read him. He is a man apart; his plays border on the tragic, they are appre-

hensive, and nobody has the heart to imitate them. His *Avare*, in which vice destroys all affection between father and son, is sublime and tragic in the highest degree. . . . In a play every action should be important in itself, and tend towards a still greater action. The *Tartufe* is in this respect a great model. Just think of the first scene, what an exposition it is ! From the beginning everything has a high significance, and leads us to expect something still more important. The exposition in Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* is excellent, but that of *Tartufe* is unique in the world ; it is the greatest and best thing of its kind. . . . Every year I read a few plays of Molière, just as from time to time I contemplate the engravings after the great Italian masters'.

I will not deny that the definition I have just given of the classic exceeds somewhat the idea one is accustomed to form under that name. We are accustomed to introduce into it above all certain conditions of regularity, wisdom, moderation and reason, which dominate and contain all the others. Having had occasion to praise M. Royer-Collard, M. de Rémusat said : ' If he has inherited from our classics the *purity of his taste*, the *propriety of his terms*, the *variety of his turns*, the attentive care with which he *suits his expression to his thought*, he owes to himself the character which he gives to it all '. We see that here the part allotted to the classical qualities apparently has to do principally with suitability and shading, with an ornate and temperate style : that too is the most general opinion. In this sense the classics par excellence would be the writers of a middle order, correct, sensible, elegant and always clear writers, who yet exhibit a noble passion, and a lightly veiled power. Marie-Joseph Chénier has defined the poetic art of these moderate and accomplished writers in these lines which show him to be their successful disciple :

C'est le bon sens, la raison qui fait tout,
Vertu, génie, esprit, talent et goût.
Qu'est-ce vertu ? raison mise en pratique ;
Talent ? raison produite avec éclat ;
Esprit ? raison qui finement s'exprime ;
Le goût n'est rien qu'un bon sens délicat ;
Et le génie est la raison sublime.

In writing these lines, he was manifestly thinking of Pope, Despréaux and Horace, the master of them all.

What is characteristic of this theory, which subordinates imagination and even sensibility to reason, and of which Scaliger perhaps raised the first signal among moderns, is that it is the *Latin* theory properly speaking, and it has also long been by preference the *French* theory. There is some truth in it, if we make proper use of this word *reason*, and do not abuse it ; but it is evident that we do abuse it, and that if reason, for example, can be confounded with poetic genius and be identical with it in a moral Epistle, it cannot be the same thing as that genius, so varied and so diversely creative in the expression of the passions of drama or epic poetry. Where will you find reason in the fourth book of the *Æneid* and in the transports of Dido ? Where will you find it in the madness of Phædra ? Be this as it may, the spirit which dictated that theory compels one to place in the first rank of classics those writers who have governed their inspiration rather than those who have yielded to it in a greater degree, to put Virgil more securely in that rank than Homer, Racine than Corneille. The masterpiece which this theory loves to quote, and which indeed unites all the conditions of prudence, of power, of graduated boldness, of moral elevation and grandeur, is *Athalie*. Turenne in his two last campaigns, and Racine in *Athalie*, those are the two great examples of what the prudent and the wise can do when they come into possession of the full maturity of their genius and enter into their boldest achievements.

Buffon, in his *Discourse on Style*, insisting on this unity of design, order and execution, which is the stamp of classic works proper, said : ' Every subject is one ; and, however vast it may be, it may be contained in a single treatise. Interruptions, pauses, sections, should only be habitual when different subjects are treated of or when, having to speak of great, intricate and disparate things, the march of genius is interrupted by the multiplicity of the obstacles, and constrained by the necessity of the circumstances : otherwise the great number of divisions, far from rendering a work more solid, destroys its unity ; the book appears clearer to the eyes, but the author's intention remains obscure. . . . ' And he continues his criticism, having in his mind Montesquieu's *Esprit des Loix*, that excellent book in regard to its substance, but

all broken up, into which the illustrious author, wearied before the end, was unable to breathe all his genius, in which he was unable to organize as it were all his matter. However, I can hardly believe that Buffon was not also thinking, by way of contrast, in this same passage, of Bossuet's *Discours sur l'Histoire universelle*, that subject which is indeed so vast and so one, and which the great preacher contrived to contain within a single treatise. Open the first edition, that of 1681, before the division into chapters which was afterwards introduced, which was transferred from the margin to the text, thus cutting it up : there everything unrolls itself in one sequence and almost in one breath, and we might say that the orator has here done what nature does according to Buffon, that *he has worked on an eternal plan, from which he has nowhere departed*, so deeply does he seem to have entered into the intimacy and the councils of Providence.

Athalie and the *Discours sur l'Histoire universelle*, those are the most sublime masterpieces that the rigorous classic theory is able to offer to its friends as to its enemies. And yet, in spite of the admirable simplicity and majesty which we see in the accomplishment of those unique productions, we should like, in the exercise of art, to extend that theory a little and show that there is room for enlarging it without going so far as to relax it. Goethe, whom I like to quote on this matter, said :

'The classic I call the *healthy*, and the romantic the *sickly*. The poem of the *Nibelungen* is classic as Homer, for both are healthy and vigorous. Most of the new things are not romantic, because they are new, but because they are feeble, sickly or morbid. The old works are not classic because they are old, but because they are strong, hale, joyous and healthy. If we distinguish the classic and the romantic according to those qualities, we shall soon see our way'.

And indeed, before arresting and fixing his ideas on the subject, I should like to see every man of free spirit first make his tour round the world, and obtain a sight of the different literatures in their primitive vigour and their infinite variety. What would he see ? In the first place a Homer, the father of the classic world, but who is himself not so surely a single and very distinct individual as the

vast and living expression of an entire epoch and a semi-barbarous civilization. To make him a classic properly speaking, it was necessary to ascribe to him, as an after-thought, a design, a plan, literary intentions, qualities of atticism and urbanity, of which he certainly never dreamt in the abundant development of his natural inspirations. And beside him, what do we see ? August and venerable ancients, Æschylus, Sophocles, but all mutilated, standing erect like ruins of themselves, the remnant of so many others as worthy no doubt of surviving as they, which have succumbed for ever to the injury of the ages. This thought alone should warn a just mind not to regard the literatures as a whole, even the classic literatures, from a too simple and narrow point of view, and he should know that that precise and measured order which has so largely prevailed since, has only been artificially introduced into our admirations of the past.

And when we come to the modern world, what shall we say ? The greatest names that we perceive at the beginnings of literatures are those which most disturb and shock certain restricted ideas which have been enunciated upon the beautiful and the fitting in poetry. Was Shakespeare, for example, a classic ? Yes, he is so to-day for England and for the world ; but, in Pope's time he was not so. Pope and his friends were the only classics par excellence ; they seemed to be definitely so on the morrow of their death. To-day they are still classics, and they deserve to be, but they are classics of the second order, and you see them for ever overshadowed and put back in their right place by the man who has resumed his own on the heights of the horizon.

It is not for me indeed to speak ill of Pope, nor of his excellent disciples, especially when they have the charm and naturalness of Goldsmith ; next to the greatest, they are the most pleasing perhaps among writers and poets, and the most capable of giving a charm to life. One day when Lord Bolingbroke was writing to Doctor Swift, Pope added a postscript to the letter, in which he said : ' I imagine that if we three were to spend only three years together, there might result some advantage for our century '. No, we should never speak lightly of men who were entitled to say such things of themselves without any boasting ; we should rather envy the happy and favoured

ages when men of talent could propose such unions, which were not a chimera in their day. Those ages, whether we call them by the name of Louis XIV or that of Queen Anne, are the only truly classical ages in the moderate sense of the word, the only ones that offer to finished talent a propitious climate and a shelter. We know it only too well, we others, in our disconnected epochs when talents, equal to them perhaps, are wasted and dissipated by the uncertainties and inclemencies of the weather. However, let us allow his due credit and superiority to every great man. The true and supreme men of genius triumph over difficulties which cause others to come to grief; Dante, Shakespeare and Milton attained their full height and produced their imperishable works, in spite of obstacles, oppressions and storms. There has been much discussion on the subject of Byron's opinions of Pope, and it has been sought to explain that kind of contradiction which made the singer of *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold* extol the purely classical school and declare it to be the only good one, whilst he himself proceeded along so different a route. Goethe again said the right word on that subject when he remarked that Byron, so great in the first casting and the source of his poetry, was afraid of Shakespeare, more powerful than he in creating his characters and making them live: 'He would have liked to deny him, for Shakespeare's geniality is a stumbling-block to him; he feels that he cannot hold his own against it. He does not deny Pope, because he does not fear him; he mentions him rather with respect whenever he can, for he knows very well that Pope is only a *wall* beside him'.

If the school of Pope had, as Byron wished, maintained its supremacy and a sort of honorary empire in the past, Byron would have been the only one and the first of his kind; the erection of the *wall* of Pope hid the great figure of Shakespeare from sight, whilst, with Shakespeare reigning and dominating in all his height, Byron is only second.

In France, we have had no great classic anterior to the age of Louis XIV; we lacked our Dantes and Shakespeares, those primitive authorities, to which one returns sooner or later in the days of emancipation. We have only had rough outlines of great poets, like Mathurin Regnier, like Rabelais, without any ideal, without the passion and

the gravity which sanctify. Montaigne was a sort of anticipated classic, of the family of Horace, who abandoned himself like a strayed child, and for want of worthy surroundings, to all the libertine fancies of his pen and his humour. The result is that we, less than any other nation, find in our ancestor-authors a title to claim openly on certain days our literary liberties and charters, and that it has been more difficult for us to remain classic whilst purchasing our freedom. However, with Molière and La Fontaine among our classics of the great century, we are so well endowed that nothing reasonable can be refused to those who shall dare and know.

The essential thing to-day appears to me to be the keeping alive of the idea and the cult, whilst enlarging it. There is no recipe for making classics ; this point ought at length to be recognized as evident. To believe that by imitating certain qualities of purity, of sobriety, of correctness and elegance, independently of character and genius, a writer may become a classic, is equivalent to believing that after Racine the elder there is room for younger Racines ; an estimable and melancholy rôle, which is the worst thing in poetry. There is something more : it is not a good thing to appear a classic too quickly and too easily, in the eyes of one's contemporaries ; the chances are against one's remaining a classic in the eyes of posterity. Fontanes, in his day, appeared a pure classic to his friends ; see what a pale colour he leaves at twenty years' distance. How many we see of those precocious classics who do not keep their promise and are classics only for a season ! Some fine morning we turn round, and are quite astonished to find them no longer standing behind us. There has only been enough of them, as Mme de Sévigné would say in her sprightly manner, *for a summer's breakfast*. In the matter of classics, the most unexpected are still the best and the greatest : ask those virile men of genius really born immortal and perpetually flourishing. Apparently the least classical of the four great poets of Louis XIV was Molière ; he was applauded more than he was esteemed by his contemporaries ; they appreciated him without knowing his worth. The least classical after him was apparently La Fontaine : and see what they have both become after two centuries. Are they not now unanimously acknowledged the richest and most fruit-

ful in flashes of a universal morality, much before Boileau, even before Racine ?

For the rest, there is really no question of sacrificing or depreciating anything. The Temple of Taste must, I believe, be rebuilt ; but, the rebuilding need not be more than an enlargement, in making it the Pantheon of the nobility of mankind, of all those who have added a notable and enduring share to the sum of enjoyments and intellectual claims. For myself, who can lay no claim (as is too evident) to be the architect or the disposer of such a Temple, I will confine myself to expressing a few wishes, and in competing, so to say, for the motto. I would not in the first place exclude any of the worthy, and would allot each one his place, from the freest of creative men of genius and the greatest of unconscious classics, Shakespeare, to the very last of the classics in diminutive, Andrieux. ' In my Father's house are many mansions ' ; ¹ that may be true of the kingdom of the beautiful here below not less than of the kingdom of heaven. Homer, as always and everywhere, would be the first, the most like a god ; but behind him we might see, like the train of the three Wise Men of the East, those three magnificent poets, those three Homers long unknown to us, who also composed for the enjoyment of the old nations of Asia their immense awe-inspiring epics, the poets Valmiki and Vyasa of the Hindoos, and Firdousi of the Persians : it is a good thing, in the realm of taste, to know at least that such men exist and not to split up the human race. Having paid this tribute to those whom it suffices to perceive and acknowledge, we should not again go beyond our range of vision, and the eye would delight in a thousand pleasing or sublime spectacles, and rejoice in a thousand discoveries full of variety and surprises, whose apparent confusion would never lack union and harmony. The most ancient of the poets and sages, those who have expressed human morality in maxims and

¹ Goethe, who is so favourable to the unrestrained diversity of geniuses and who believes every development to be reasonable provided that it attains the ends of art, ingeniously compared the Parnassus to Mount Serrat in Catalonia, which is or was quite peopled with hermits, every recess concealing its pious anchorite : ' The Parnassus, he says, is a Mount Serrat which admits a number of settlements on its divers slopes ; let each one go and look around him, and he will find some place that will suit his convenience, whether it be a summit or a nook in the rocks '.

have sung it in simple form, would converse together with *rare and sweet* words, and would not be astonished, at the very first words, at being understood. The Solons, the Hesiods, the Theognis, the Jobs, the Solomons, and why not Confucius himself ? would welcome the most ingenious of the moderns, the La Rochefoucaulds and the La Bruyères, who would say to themselves when they heard them : ' They knew all that we know, and, though we have given a new form to experience, we have discovered nothing new '. On the most conspicuous hill and the most accessible slope Virgil might be seen surrounded by Menander, Tibullus, Terence, Fénelon, entering with them into conversations of a great charm and a holy fascination : his fair face would be illumined by the sun's ray and coloured with a blush of modesty, as on that day when, entering the theatre at Rome the moment after his verses had been recited, he saw the whole people rising by a unanimous movement, and paying him the same homage that they paid to Augustus. Not far from him, and with regret at being separated from a friend so dear, Horace would in his turn preside (as well as a poet and so shrewd a sage may be said to preside) over the group of poets of civil life, and those who could chat as well as sing—Pope, Despréaux, the one become less irritable, the other less surly : Montaigne, that true poet, would be in the group, and would remove from this charming corner all appearance of a literary school. La Fontaine would stray into it, and, henceforth less flighty, would not again leave it. Voltaire would pass by, but, though pleased by it, would not have the patience to remain. On the same hill as Virgil, and a little lower down, we should see Xenophon, with a simple air quite unsuggestive of the military leader, but more like a priest of the Muses, gathering around him the Athenians of every language and every country, the Addisons, the Pellissons, the Vauvenargues, all those who know the value of easy persuasion, of exquisite simplicity and of pleasing negligence mingled with ornament. In the centre of the place three great men would often meet with pleasure before the portico of the principal temple (for there would be several in the enclosure), and, when they were together, no fourth person, great as he might be, would think of mingling with their conversation or their silence,

so much beauty and proportion would he see in their greatness, so much of that perfection of harmony which only appears for a day when the world is young. Their three names have become the ideal of art : Plato, Sophocles and Demosthenes. And, in spite of all, these demigods having been honoured, do you not see over there a large and familiar crowd of excellent spirits which will prefer to follow the Cervantes, the Molières ever, the practical painters of life, those indulgent friends who are at the same time the first of benefactors, who take the whole of man with his laughter, pour experience into his gaiety, and know the most powerful means of creating a sensible, hearty and legitimate mirth ? I will not continue any longer this description which, if it were complete, would fill a whole book. The Middle Age, believe me, and Dante would occupy the consecrated heights : at the feet of the singer of Paradise the whole of Italy almost would spread out like a garden ; Boccaccio and Ariosto would be seen in playful mood, and Tasso revisiting the orange plain of Sorrento. The different nations in general would each have a reserved corner, but the authors would take pleasure in leaving it, and in their wanderings would recognize masters and brothers where they least expected to find them. Lucretius, for example, would love to discuss with Milton the origin of the world and the transformation of chaos into order ; but, whilst reasoning each in his own way, they would agree on the divine pictures of poetry and nature.

Those are our classics ; each one's imagination may finish the drawing and even choose its favourite group. For one must choose, and the first condition of good taste, after comprehending all, is not to be continually on one's travels, but to settle down for once and fix one's abode. Nothing dulls and kills taste more effectually than endless travels ; the poetic mind is not a *Wandering Jew*. But when I speak of settling down and choosing, I do not conclude that we should imitate even those who please us most among the masters of the past. Let us be satisfied with feeling them, penetrating and admiring them, and let us who have come so late, try at least to be ourselves. Let us choose among our own instincts. Let us be sincere and natural in our own thoughts and feelings—that is always possible ; let us, what is more

difficult, aim high, and aspire, if we can, to reach some highly placed goal ; and whilst speaking our own language, whilst submitting to the conditions of the ages in which we are cast and from which we draw our strength as well as our faults, let us ask ourselves from time to time, with our brow raised towards the hills and our eyes fixed upon the groups of revered mortals : *What would they say of us ?*

But why should we always speak of being authors and writing ? there will come a time perhaps when people will cease to write. Happy are those who read, who re-read, those who are able to follow their own free inclination in their readings ! There comes a season in our lives when, all our travels being ended, all our experiments made, we have no keener enjoyments than to study and deeply meditate upon the things we know, to relish what we feel, just as when we see and meet again those we love : pure delights of the heart and the taste in maturity. It is then that the word classic assumes its real meaning, and is defined for every man of taste by a favourite and irresistible choice. Then the taste is formed and definite ; our good sense is consummated, if it is ever to come. We have no time to try nor the desire to go forth in search of discoveries. We are satisfied with the friends we have, who have been proved so by long intercourse. Old wines, old books, old friends. We say with Voltaire in those delightful lines :

Jouissons, écrivons, vivons, mon cher Horace !

J'ai vécu plus que toi : mes vers dureront moins ;
 Mais, au bord du tombeau, je mettrai tous mes soins
 A suivre les leçons de ta philosophie,
 A mépriser la mort en savourant la vie,
 A lire tes écrits pleins de grâce et de sens,
 Comme on boit d'un vin vieux qui rajeunit les sens.

In short, whether it be Horace or any other, whoever may be the author we prefer and who gives us back our own thoughts enriched and matured, we will then go to one of those good and antique spirits and converse with them at all moments, to ask a friendship that shall not deceive or fail us, and that habitual impression of serenity and amenity that will reconcile us, for we have often need of it, with our fellow-men and ourselves.

MADAME DE CAYLUS AND WHAT WE CALL URBANITY.

Monday, October 28, 1850.

It has often been my lot to speak of that happy age of the language and of good taste which, with us, corresponds to the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, when, after the appearance of the greatest works and in the vicinity of the best as well as the most agreeable minds, the delicacy was extreme, and corruption (as I call pretentiousness) had not yet set in. To-day I should like to exemplify this perfect moment in an agreeable and distinct lady who paints it with vivacity and charm, and who paints but that. It would be easy to find greater examples than Mme de Caylus, who wrote little and by chance; but those examples would prove something different, something over and above what I have in view, and the delicacy of which I would like to give an idea would be complicated in some way by the talent of the writer itself. Here, on the other hand, in stopping for an instant to consider this lady with her light and delicate pen, we shall not be in any way distracted from the point I am particularly anxious to emphasize, and which those who knew her best would designate, with their eyes on her, as *pure urbanity*.

Mme de Caylus was a niece of Mme de Maintenon, a niece *in the Breton fashion* (cousin's daughter). The great d'Aubigné of the seventeenth century, the warrior-writer, the Calvinist-Frondeur, that bold and caustic companion of Henri IV, had a son and two daughters: Mme de Maintenon was the son's daughter; Mme de Caylus was a granddaughter of one of the daughters. Mme de Caylus' father, the Marquis de Villette, a distinguished naval officer, who left some *Memoirs* behind him, appears to have inherited some of his grandfather's

courage and wit. Mme de Caylus herself took not a little after that great ancestor: under her feminine grace and her angelic air, she had a quick, steely, biting wit. She is a Hamilton disguised as a woman. At first she appears to be occupied solely with pleasures, amusements and society triflings; but do not imagine that we have to do with a frivolous, empty-headed woman. Her mind is firm and clear, observant and sensible; like Mme de Maintenon's, it is solid: but in her case the solidity is concealed under the flower. The foundation may be perceived by any one that seeks it; and, after having lived for some time at her side, one decides that there is nothing like a strong race, when grace mingles with and crowns it.

Born in 1673, in the province of Poitou, Mlle Marguerite de Villette-Murçay was *abducted* at the age of seven by Mme de Maintenon. The King was at that time converting, willy-nilly, the Huguenots in his kingdom, and Mme de Maintenon, following his example, had imposed it upon herself as a duty to convert her own family. The little Mlle de Murçay was abducted then while her father was at sea. An aunt, a sister of her father, lent a hand in this so well-meant abduction. We must hear Mme de Caylus herself relate this first adventure: 'Hardly had my mother left Niort, when my aunt, who had a habit of changing her religion, and had just been converted for the second or the third time, departed in her turn and took me with her to Paris'. On the way they meet with other girls of a more mature age, whom Mme de Maintenon also laid hands upon to convert. These young persons, resolved to offer resistance, are as astonished as they are grieved to see the little de Murçay carried away without anybody to defend her:

'For my part, says the latter, content to go without knowing whither I was being taken, I was neither grieved nor astonished at anything. . . . We arrived at Paris together, and Mme de Maintenon immediately came to fetch me, and took me alone to Saint-Germain. At first I wept many tears; but next day I thought the King's Mass so beautiful, that I consented to become a Catholic on condition that I should hear it every day, and be spared any further whippings. That was all the controversy that was employed, and all the abjuration I made'.

From the tone in which Mme de Caylus relates these things, generally reputed so important, one wonders what she really thought about them. Does she know herself? Like Mme de Sévigné, her wit, her disposition run away with her; the truth appears amusing, and she tells it gaily.

Meanwhile Mme de Maintenon brings her up, and educates her as she is so well able to do, with good taste, with precision and in perfection. All those careless and rather airy graces, which might have run the risk of being emancipated too soon and of disporting themselves at random, will become regulated and improved; they will reappear in time. She is married at thirteen (1686) and poorly enough. It was one of the manifestations of Mme de Maintenon's humility to arrange a poor marriage for this charming niece who was sought by the most eligible. Mme de Maintenon is quite full of those refinements of modesty and disinterestedness with a view to consideration and glory: in this case the young child bore the costs of her aunt's virtues. The husband they gave her, M. de Caylus, very mediocre with respect to fortune, was in other respects one of the least worthy of her. When he died in Flanders (November, 1704), 'he pleased all his family; he was blasé, besotted for years by wine and eau-de-vie', and he was kept winter and summer at the frontier, under prohibition to approach either his wife or the Court. To such a man, to a man of such promise, did Mme de Maintenon, from principle, and in preference to any other, consider it her duty to give a young girl who had been reared with so much care and of whom all the witnesses give enchanting descriptions

'Never was seen, exclaims Saint-Simon, a face so intelligent so pathetic, so speaking; never was seen such freshness, so much grace or wit, so much gaiety and enjoyment; never was seen a more fascinating creature'.

And the Abbé de Choisy, who saw her then and since, and liked her at every age, says:

'Sport and Laughter shone in emulation around her: her mind was more amiable even than her face; one had no time to breathe or to feel bored when she was anywhere. All the Champmeslés in the world had none of those ravishing tones

which she uttered when reciting ; and, if her natural gaiety had allowed her to repress certain little coquettish airs which all her innocence could not justify, she would have been perfect '.

Apropos of this comparison with the Champmeslé, it must be remembered that Mme de Caylus played the part of Esther at Saint-Cyr, and that she played it better than the celebrated actress could have done. She had not been educated at Saint-Cyr, having come too soon for that ; but she saw the beginnings of it ; and, one day when Racine was reading to Mme de Maintenon some scenes of *Esther* which he was then writing for that house, Mme de Caylus began to recite them so well and in so touching a voice, that Racine entreated Mme de Maintenon to ask her niece to play in it. It was for her in fact that he composed the prologue of *La Piété*, with which she made her début ; but Mme de Caylus, once engaged, did not confine herself to that prologue, and successively played all the parts, especially that of Esther. She had only one fault, which was that she acted too well, she appealed too much to the heart by certain accents : ' They are continuing to perform *Esther*, wrote Mme de Sévigné to her daughter (February 11, 1689) : Mme de Caylus, who was the Champmeslé of the piece, does not play any more ; she acted too well, she was too pathetic : they wish to see only the purest simplicity in these little innocent souls '. Mme de Caylus is supposed to have been the last person, the last actress who preserved the pure declamation of Racine, the degree of cadence and chanting which suited those melodious lines, which were expressly created for the voice of a Caylus or a La Vallière.

You may already understand what I meant to say when I spoke of that perfection of culture and taste in a lady who, at the age of fifteen, saw the birth of *Esther*, who breathed its first perfume and so successfully penetrated its spirit that she seemed, by the emotion of her voice, to add something to it.

This emotion, with all the budding sentiments it promised, Mme de Caylus had not in her voice only. I have not undertaken to relate her life, and she herself in her *Souvenirs* has hardly spoken of what relates to herself. But Saint-Simon has supplied us with information on that, as on so many other points, in such a way as to leave

nothing to be desired. By her mocking sallies, by the vivaciousness of her wit and her heart, by her liaison with the Duc de Villeroy, Mme de Caylus brought upon herself her banishment from Court at the age of nineteen. She was banished a first time and perhaps a second, so that for not less than thirteen or fourteen years she was thrust into a corner and in a sort of penitence. She consoled herself at first by living at Paris in the company of the men of wit who resided there; she knew La Fare, who wrote for her his prettiest verses. She had a house and received her friends. However, on a certain day, whether through ennui or caprice, or a recollection of *Esther*, she began to incline to the side of piety, and a not very accommodating piety: she had chosen Father de La Tour for her confessor, a very intelligent man and uncompromising, who is well known as the General of the Congregation of the Oratory. But this Father was suspected of Jansenism, and Mme de Maintenon, in her strict good sense, which always inclined in the direction of worldly prudence and utility, would have preferred her niece to be without a director rather than that she should have one who was an object of suspicion at Court. She managed so well that Mme de Caylus, then a young widow, imperceptibly dropped her director and her austerity at the same time, and resumed her worldly habits. She reappeared at Versailles, at the King's supper, on February 10, 1707, 'fair as an angel'¹. It was not less than thirteen years, so they said, since she had seen the King. But, by force of wit, charm and address, she recovered all her lost ground, and it was as if her eclipse had never taken place. She propitiated and reconquered her aunt; she became indispensable to her. She was soon familiar and at home everywhere, and her apparent favour was so complete that, about 1710, it drew upon her some wretched satiric lines which the curious may seek in the *Recueil de Maurepas*. Mme de Caylus remained at Versailles until the death of Louis XIV (1715); neglected,

¹ *At last, Madame, your Madame de Caylus has reappeared at Court, not without some confusion both for herself and for me, but she was very well received'. It is Mme de Maintenon who writes this to Mme des Ursins on February 13, 1707. Mme des Ursins had always taken the part of Mme de Caylus, that pretty friend whom she calls 'one of the most charming women in the world'. These letters of Mme de Maintenon and Mme des Ursins are full of Mme de Caylus.

then as a lady of the old Court, she returned to live in Paris, in a little house which formed a part of the gardens of the Luxembourg. There she lived half retired from the world, seeing her friends and the Duc de Villeroy to the last; often having with her her son the Comte de Caylus, an eccentric and a philosopher, entertaining men of the world and scholars at her supper-table, and mixing up together piety, decorum, intellectual freedom and the charms of society, in that perfect and somewhat confused measure which was of the preceding century. She died in April, 1729, not more than fifty-six years of age.

The portraits we have of her in her youth correspond very well to the idea that Saint-Simon, the Abbé de Choisy and Mme de Coulanges have given us of her beauty. Whether in morning dress, in Court dress, or in winter costume, she appears delicate, slender, tall, dignified, elegant and pretty; a tall figure and of very noble bearing; a rather round face, an angelic face, in which gentleness is allied with roguishness, a delicate mouth around which mockery often plays, fine eyes from which flash charm and wit: altogether grace and distinction itself. What more can I say? that face has but to choose, it will be by turns, and at will, *Esther* or *Célimène*¹.

As to direct testimony to her wit, we find it in the volume of her Correspondence with Mme de Maintenon and in her *Souvenirs*. This little book of *Souvenirs*, published in 1770 with notes and a preface by Voltaire, seems nothing to-day, because all its anecdotes have since passed into circulation and one knows them by heart without remembering where they come from; but it was she who first told them so well. This little book is in the style of the *Memoirs* of Queen Marguerite and of a few

¹ She early lost her health; her figure was marred. Her person preserved all its charm. 'Mme de Caylus is the prettiest old lady that you know; she often has that fine colour that you have seen, and at these times she is as pretty as she has ever been; for the rest more delicate than myself, never dressing; almost always in bed, and threatened with very considerable ailments'. (Letter from Mme de Maintenon to Mme des Ursins, September 18, 1713.)—I regret to say that, whilst still young, she took snuff: 'As for snuff, I will not speak of it, although to me it seems a horror: I cannot tolerate it even in Mme de Caylus' pretty nose; I am inclined to believe that her director has ordered her to take it to make her less agreeable'. (Mme des Ursins to Mme de Maintenon, February 22, 1707.)

historical pages of Mme de La Fayette : it is *the work of an after-dinner*. One can see no effort in it : *she did not task herself*, they said of Mme de Caylus. Her pen hastens along with abandon, with negligence ; but it is the negligence that constitutes the ease and charm of conversation. Ask of her no more than a rapid succession of portraits and sketches, in that she excels. This light pen touches everything to a nicety ; she catches the dominating feature of each person and shows as much of it as is necessary. Mme de Maintenon is drawn to the life, with her good qualities, but without flattery, and we might even, here and there, discover a little malice under the praise. Louis XIV is painted with clear and accurate touches which exhibit him without any exaggeration and to the best advantage in his habitual life : we see a king who is worthy of that great epoch in which all thought and spoke so well. Mme de Montespan, who had so much piquancy and a unique turn for raillery and humour, had imagined that she would always rule the King because she thought herself intellectually superior to him. Let us see how Mme de Caylus with a few words disposes of this supposed superiority which is only occasional :

'The King could not perhaps talk so well as she, although he spoke perfectly well. He thought accurately, expressed himself with dignity ; and his least prepared replies contained in a few words all the best that was to be said according to times, things and persons. He had in greater degree than his mistress the wit that gives one an advantage over others. Never in a hurry to speak, he examined, he penetrated characters and thoughts ; but, as he was prudent and knew how much the words of kings are weighed, he often kept to himself what his penetration had made him discover. If important business was to be discussed, the most able and best informed were astonished at his knowledge, convinced that he knew more than they, and charmed at the manner in which he expressed himself. If he was inclined to be playful and to jest, if he condescended to tell a story, he did so with an infinite grace, a noble and delicate turn that I have observed in no other'.

That is how Louis XIV spoke, and how he kept his royal rank in that intellectual century. Add to this page of Mme de Caylus a *Conversation* at the siege of Lille, recorded by Pellisson, and you will understand the literary

side, as I venture to call it, of Louis XIV, and how the language was, in sense and expression, excellent as well as royal when he spoke it. Without any flattery, and looking merely at the plenitude and the correctness of the terms he used in ordinary talk, he might have been one of the first Academicians in his kingdom.

Mme de Caylus has a direct and quick observation; she goes to the bottom of a person's character without appearing to do so. When she paints Mlle de Fontanges with her beauty and her romantic kind of silliness, and shows how the King, even though she had lived, could not long be in love with her, she does it all in a very few words: 'One may get accustomed to beauty, but one cannot accustom oneself to a silliness which turns to insincerity, especially if one lives at the same time with persons of intellect and character, like Mme de Montespan, who did not overlook the smallest absurdities, and who was so well able to point them out to others with that unique expression peculiar to the house of Montemart'. And yet this same Mlle de Fontanges, that vain and silly beauty, one day read Mme de Maintenon a lesson, when the latter was exhorting her with her hard rectitude to cure herself of a passion which could not make her happy: 'You speak of leaving off a passion, she replied, as one speaks of leaving off a coat'. This witless girl was at that moment enlightened by her heart.

What at first sight distinguishes all these portraits of Mme de Caylus, is their subtlety; the power and boldness at the back of them are only veiled. But there are moments when the right word comes out and the strong expression flashes forth. The *shamelessness* of Mme de Montespan brazening out her successive pregnancies, the *meanness* of the Condés with their ambition to become allied with the King through all his bastard branches, all these points are touched boldly and as befits the granddaughter of d'Aubigné. The King, after having settled the Duc du Maine in marriage, at first remonstrates with that prince on the conduct of his wife, who is ruining him; but, 'seeing at last that his remonstrances only serve to cause inner suffering to a son whom he loves, he resigns himself to silence, and *allows him to wallow* in his blindness and his weakness'. There is nothing effeminate in all these tones. We feel, even in reading the words

of these polished women, that Molière no less than Racine brought his genius to their cradle, and that Saint-Simon was not far.

I might, if I wished, draw up a list of Mme de Caylus' bold sayings, which would show her to be, in a mitigated style, a true daughter however of Mme de Sévigné. She can change her tone when necessary, and adapt her touch to her persons: 'Mlle de Rambures had the style of the family of the Nogents to which Madame her mother belonged: lively, bold, and all the wit that is needed to please men without being handsome. She attacked the King and did not displease him . . .'.¹ That is the way a person speaks who can say anything; and, just beside it, what a finished portrait in two lines! 'Mlle de Jarnac, plain and sickly, will not take up much room in my *Souvenirs*. She lived little and sadly; *she had, somebody said, a fine complexion to light up her ugliness*'. One must be a Hamilton or a woman to invent such touches. 'She had it in her to be spiteful', Saint-Simon said of Mme de Caylus. Penetrating and truthful minds are much perplexed by the part they play in this world: if they tell what they see and what is true, they run a risk of being considered spiteful. Mme de Caylus was only a truthful painter, who could not help, even when speeding along, catching her subjects true to life, whether it was Mlle de Jarnac with her ugliness set off by so good a light, or that ravishing Mlle de Lowœnstein, with her 'nymph-like figure set off by a flame-coloured ribbon'. All that series in which she exhibits to our view the squadron of the Dauphine's maids of honour, and in general the whole file of the Court ladies, is like a gallery in Hamilton: the same period, the same subtlety of brush, the same delicate and momentarily cruel causticity. Mme de Caylus is a mistress in her own way of that continual irony of which she speaks, and which the wittiest and most naturalized strangers among us could not always understand. The Duchess of Burgundy, a native of Savoy, although so much of a Frenchwoman in many respects, could not get used to it, and would sometimes say to Mme de Maintenon: 'Aunt, they laugh at everything here'!

¹ Peutot's text in the *Collection des Mémoires*, though claiming to be more exact, is at times less Attic than that of the preceding editions. I say this for those who are particular.

There were in fact so many things to laugh at ! Mme de Caylus' anecdotes are little scenes which, though hardly striking, often leave an ineffaceably comic impression. Would you like me to relate one of those scenes in which M. de Montausier, in which Bossuet himself plays an amusing part ? It was the eve of a Holy Week or a Jubilee, and the King, who had some religion, wanted to wean himself from Mme de Montespan, who was also religious in her own way. Thereupon the two lovers part, and separately lament their sins. But let us hear Mme de Caylus in her inimitable narrative :

' The Jubilee over, with profit or not, the question was : would Mme de Montespan return to Court ? " Why not ? said her kinsfolk and friends, even the most virtuous (such as M. de Montausier). Mme de Montespan, by her birth and her office, belongs there ; she can live there as good a Christian as elsewhere ". The Bishop of Meaux (*Bossuet*) was of that opinion. There remained one difficulty, however : shall Mme de Montespan, they added, appear before the King without any preparation ? They would have to see each other before meeting in public, in order to avoid the awkwardness of a surprise. On this principle, it was decided that the King should come to Mme de Montespan's ; but, not to give calumny the least occasion to bite, it was agreed that some respectable ladies, the most serious at Court, should be present at this interview, and that the King should only see Mme de Montespan with them. The King came then to Mme de Montespan's, as had been decided ; but imperceptibly he drew her into a window-recess ; they spoke long together in a low voice, wept, and said what people are wont to say in such circumstances ; then they made a profound curtsy to those venerable matrons, and passed into another chamber ; and the result was Madame the Duchess of Orleans, and afterwards Monsieur the Count of Toulouse '.

Those were the last two of the seven children whom the King had by Mme de Montespan.

' I cannot, adds Mme de Caylus, here deny myself the expression of a thought that comes into my mind : it seems to me that one still sees in the character, in the expression, and in the whole person of Madame the Duchess of Orleans, the traces of that struggle between love and the Jubilee '.

It is asserted that there is here a little error on the part of Mme de Caylus, that she was mistaken by a year, and that the scene of the reconciliation in question took place

after Holy Week of 1675, and not on the occasion of the Jubilee, which occurred the following year. And what matters whether the Jubilee was a year sooner or later ? the point is that it reappears in the expression of this daughter of the King and Mme de Montespan. But, tell me was there ever a livelier, a gayer, bolder, more unexpected and more natural way of telling a story ? There is nothing indefinite and nothing in excess. How well it is all painted, how well engraved, with no undue emphasis !

This brings us to the examination of a question which has already been treated, and with which the name of Mme de Caylus has been associated from the beginning. What is urbanity, and wherein does it properly consist ? Does it lie entirely in the aptness and the brevity of a bon mot ? does it lie above all in irony, in a lively and facetious humour, or must we seek it elsewhere ? An Abbé, a man of learning and wit, the Abbé Gédoyne, the same who translated Quintilian, and who translated it all the better for having been on good terms with Ninon (to have been on good terms with Ninon is always useful), the Abbé Gédoyne, we say, treated this question of urbanity, and finished his agreeable and learned Memoir by the addition of a *Eulogy* of Mme de Caylus, remarking that, of all the persons he had known, not one conveyed so vividly what he understood by the word *urbanity*. Let us see then what the amiable Abbé understood by this word ; we shall be still concerning ourselves with Mme de Caylus.

According to the Abbé Gédoyne, *urbanity*, that quite Roman word, which originally signified no more than the pleasingness and the purity of the language of the city par excellence (*urbs*), by opposition to the language of the provinces, and which was properly speaking for Rome what Atticism was for Athens, that word soon came to express a quality of polish or politeness not only in speech and accent, but in the mind, in the manner and the whole exterior of a person. Then, with use and time, it came to express still more, and to signify not only a quality of language and intellect, but also a sort of virtue and social and moral quality which makes a man agreeable to others, which embellishes and strengthens social intercourse. In this complete and charming sense, urbanity demands a character of good nature and suavity, even in malice.

Irony is compatible with it, but it must be a pleasant irony, that irony which has been so well defined as the *salt of urbanity*. To possess urbanity, as Gedoyn understands it, is to possess *morals* (*mœurs*), not morals in the austere sense, but in the ancient sense. Horace and Cæsar had them. To have morals in this delicate sense, which is that of well-bred people, implies not thinking oneself better than others, not to preach, not to abuse anybody in the name of morality. Hard, rude, unsociable and fanatic minds are excluded from urbanity, the peevish critic, even if he is right, cannot lay claim to it. Even melancholy minds are not admitted, for in every urbane nature there is a gay and cheerful foundation, there is a smile. Considering the extreme care which the ancients took to impart to their children, from their infancy, that delicate tact and exquisite sense, one is struck by its difference to modern education. When we see in the works of Cicero and others, particularly in Quintilian, a great mind has remarked (Bolingbroke), the care, the trouble, the continual application, which went to form the great men of antiquity, we are astonished that there were not more of them: and when we reflect on the education of youth in our days, we are astonished that a single man is reared who is capable of being useful to his country. This remark, which will appear very severe if extended to all education, remains evident if applied to urbanity alone. Comparing on this point the education of our days to that of the ancients, one is quite surprised that a little of the word and the thing still remains among us. At the end of the seventeenth century, that is to say, at the finest moment of our past, complaints were already heard: and yet it was the golden age of urbanity. But the women of the time, with that natural facility which at all times distinguishes them, were more successful than the men in offering perfect models of what we are in search of, the seeds of which were scattered as it were in the air one breathed. It is in them, in the women who wrote, that we are most certain to find evidence of that seemingly familiarity, of that delicate mockery, of that ease in saying anything, which fulfilled the conditions of the ancients: all the more because they were unconscious of it. 'All that is excessive is necessarily unbecoming, and whatever is *laboured* cannot have any grace.' That is

what the Quintilians and the Gédoyns said, and that is what we may verify in reading the simple pages of Mme de Caylus. The Abbé Gédoyne was so sensible of it (and that is to his credit), that having finished his *Memoir* with a sort of compliment to the Academicians before whom he read it, he hastened to add a postscript, and to point to Mme de Caylus as a more conclusive example, and as *documentary evidence*.

The *Eulogy* of her, which is printed at the end of this *Memoir* of the Abbé Gédoyne, and which we owe to the pen of a certain M. Rémond (one of those delicate idlers who have left only a few lines)¹, exhibits her under a new light, even after the eulogies of Choisy and Saint-Simon. There we see her beautiful in maturity, agreeable still, uniting to the flowers of wit of a Mme de La Sablière the fundamental solidity of a Mme de La Fayette, of a conversation that varied and suited the occasion, now serious, now sprightly, not hating even the pleasures of the table, becoming more witty under their influence, and presiding over them like Homer's Helen :

' Mme de Caylus, says M. Rémond in this place, *drove further than Helen* ; she communicated to the souls of her guests so keen and agreeable a joy, a taste for pleasure so noble and elegant, that all ages and all characters appeared amiable and happy. So surprising is power, or rather the magic of a woman who possesses real charms ' !

There might be something alarming perhaps and something misleading in this word *charms* and this comparison with Helen, if we did not know that this portrait of Mme de Caylus was drawn in her last years, when her youth was past, and that the whole refers to the enchantment of her mind. In this sense we should understand this other passage in the *Eulogy*, which says : ' As soon as one had made her acquaintance, one unconsciously forsook one's mistresses, because they began to give less pleasure ; and it was difficult to live in her society without becoming her friend and lover ' . These strong expressions

¹ Voltaire was very hard on this M. Rémond in the Letter he wrote on Ninon (*Mélanges littéraires*), and he used as a weapon against him some witticism of Ninon herself, of whom Rémond claimed to be a disciple. The Abbé Fraguier, a man of taste, highly extolled Rémond in his Latin Poems ; we are told that he spoke less well of him in prose. All I can say is, that the *Eulogy* of Mme de Caylus is, in my opinion, very delicate.

of the platonic painter are only calculated the better to render that joy of the spirit and that pure intoxication of the charm one insensibly felt in her presence.

For, to return once more to Quintilian's conclusion as modernly interpreted by Gédoyen, ease, discretion, subtlety, not to be too emphatic, not to carry a thing too far, those are certainly the conditions of urbanity, but all that is of no avail without a certain spirit of joy and good-nature which animates the whole : *that is precisely a charm*, as La Fontaine said.

I will not dwell any more on those airy graces of the authoress in her little book of *Souvenirs*, which is unfinished, but so agreeable and so gallantly turned, and which everybody may read for himself ; they will refresh their memory of things they already knew, and especially regain their relish for that manner of saying everything lightly. In the art of painting a portrait, and with an apparent artlessness, Mme de Caylus is a master. But I ask you to permit me to follow her in her Correspondence with Mme de Maintenon. This Correspondence goes back to the time when Mme de Caylus, a young and pretty widow, was living in disgrace at Paris, and before her return to Versailles. Mme de Maintenon gives her some sensible advice on how to conduct herself, but her advice is so strict and so hard, that it would really make anybody disposed to disregard it. Mme de Caylus did not disregard it and only half obeyed it. Once back at Versailles, we see her, in her letters (or rather her short notes written from one room to another), displaying all her graceful and pretty charms to soften her aunt, to amuse and enliven her. Mme de Maintenon, intellectually so agreeable, had a fund of seriousness, of melancholy and even austerity ; she had amassed treasures of ennui in amusing others, and from her youth up had dried up her soul in gaining the favour of those greater than herself. So, as soon as she was alone, she enjoyed solitude before everything as a rest and relaxation. Mme de Caylus does her utmost to gain access to her aunt in these rare moments ; she teases and torments her with all respect in order to cheer her : ' I do not know what the Academy will have to say about the word *acoquiner* (*to captivate*, etc.), but when I am with you I feel all the energy of it ' ! she says to her. She calls herself the *Superintendent of her pleasures*, and

laments that the office is declining in her hands. Mme de Maintenon had made herself indispensable to the King and the whole royal family, and she had not a single moment of respite. Even when the King was working with his ministers, she had to be there. Oh ! how much at these moments even Mme de Caylus would have liked to sit mute and smiling beside her aunt ! ' Who sees you not has no pleasure, she writes to her. I infinitely regret not being able to share *M. Peletier's* back with you '. No doubt *M. Le Peletier de Souzy* : he was a Director-general and a State Councillor, who worked every week with the King. Another day she envies *Fanchon*, the *femme de chambre* : ' Why cannot I slip in in her shape during the absence of *M. de Pontchartrain's* back ' ! *M. de Pontchartrain*, one of the Secretaries of State, was, it seems, one of the least amusing. In short, to gain admittance and be received, she makes herself small, she makes herself a cipher ; she would disguise herself, if she could, in the form of a duty or an ennui ; she feels that in this shape she would have the greater chance of penetrating. Here is one of her prettiest letters, in which she speaks of herself by the name of the *little niece*, and in which she entreats her aunt, and that in every possible tone, to grant her the favour of seeing a little more of her :

' I have thought over your week, and I cannot consider it well arranged without a little more of the *little niece* : why not see her sometimes with the little family ? She would be as dull at play as you could wish ; she would work so soberly ! she would listen or read aloud with so much pleasure ! In short, and this would be perhaps her best recommendation, she would depart at the smallest sign. If you will leave her in the world, she assures you without any hypocrisy that she will find more time for it than necessary ; after all, she sees nothing but the cabals (*thus she called her familiar coterie, Mme de Dangeau, Mme d'O, etc.*) of which she sees enough when with you, or her Marshals of France who do not charm her so much that she cannot dispense with their presence ; she fears the ministers ; she does not love the princesses ; if it is repose that you wish her, she finds it only with you ; if it is her health, she finds there her diet and her commodity ; in a word, she finds everything with you and nothing without you. After this sincere statement, command, but not like a *Nero* '.

Nero's name frequently returns to her pen to express playfully that negative habit of Mme de Maintenon, who

was inexorable in the privations she imposed on others as well as on herself¹. One day Mme de Caylus sent her a little distaff; for Mme de Maintenon was fond of spinning with her own hands, semi-queen though she was: it was another display of simplicity and humility added to all the others. But listen to the pretty things that Mme de Caylus says in her letter accompanying and wrapped round the distaff:

'Why have I not all the graces of a light spirit to introduce into your solitude the lightest of all distaffs! It is pretty, if you like; but, after that, it is given you by a person who, when she is beside you, would like not to lose sight of it. . . . Depart, my distaff, there is no irony in saying that I envy you: nothing is more true'.

We could imagine that we feel the breath of an Epigram of the Greek Anthology.

She is thus inexhaustible in her twists and turns, and in charmingly harping on this perpetual string; she tries, in a word, to throw one of her own beams of light upon this self-mortifying old age: 'I am very ungrateful to the sun for shining with such brilliance into my room when you are not here'.

Towards the end she has so effectually taken possession of her aunt's mind, that the two have become like one person and plot together to amuse the King: 'It is certain that we should do a great service to the State by prolonging the King's life with amusements'.

Mme de Maintenon, in spite of her appearing to resist it, is not insensible to so much good grace². Whether it

¹ This is certainly an allusion to Racine's Nero in *Britannicus*, and to this line which is here pleasantly applied:

Dans son appartement, Gardes, qu'on la remène!

² Mme des Ursins, in her letters to Mme de Maintenon, had never ceased to make the most of her friend, since her return to her aunt's favour; she varies her praise in every tone: 'There is no disguise in her, and she is as pleasing in mind as in her face. . . . You would find endless resources in her, as nobody is more witty and more amusing without any malice'. In the end Mme de Maintenon confesses herself almost vanquished: 'It is true that I am becoming more reconciled than before to Mme de Caylus, because she appears to me to have recovered from her infatuation for Jansenism, since it is difficult to be on agreeable terms with those who think differently from ourselves: her face is still as charming, but her figure shows to very little advantage; for the rest, I know no woman who is so reasonable as she is'. (Letter to Mme des Ursins, August 26, 1714.)

was a little stirring of the heart or merely a strong intellectual liking, she had a fondness for that niece that she had for no other person; she called her her *true niece*, and, especially after the death of Louis XIV, we see her drawn towards her by a solid friendship. It is true that Mme de Caylus is so perfect, so respectful at the same time and so familiar; she knows so well how to keep within the right bounds when writing to her, what amount of information to withhold from her, what sad news of the world and what awkward truths should not be concealed from her, and what others it is unnecessary to enlarge upon; she knows so well how to be serious even in a hurried note: 'I will say nothing of the beauty of your letters, Mme de Maintenon wrote to her (1716); I should appear to flatter you, and one should not change one's character at my age'. We should however, if we confined ourselves to her letters, form rather too serious an idea of Mme de Caylus. When writing to her aunt (is there any need to say so?) she shows herself without hypocrisy, but from her more sedate and more uniform side: she no doubt allows us to see only a half of her life. In her little house in the Luxembourg, which is retired and rustic, and which is reached like a village by a roundabout way, she appears almost like a retired farmer's wife on the morrow of the grandeurs of Versailles:

'It is a delight to rise early; I look out of my window upon my whole empire, and feel proud in seeing under my sway two hens, a cock and eight chickens, a cellar which I have transformed into a dairy, a cow which grazes at the gates of the large garden, through a tolerance which will not be of long duration. I dare not ask Mme de Berry to suffer a cow. Alas! it is enough if she suffers me'.

The Duchesse de Berry was that same daughter of the Regent who was about to fill the Palace of the Luxembourg with her orgies. Alluding to these, Mme de Caylus says again, in a very thoughtful image:

'I am very comfortable here, I do not lose a single sunbeam, nor a word of the vespers of a Seminary (Saint-Sulpice) to which women have no access; thus all life is a mixture: on the one side this palace (*the Luxembourg*), and on the other, praises to God'!

Mme de Maintenon, though she believed her to be a good parishioner, was very sensible to the fact that this charming niece was not become a recluse, and that she received friends of all kinds: 'You can indeed dispense with pleasures, she said, but pleasures cannot dispense with you'.

Such was Mme de Caylus so far as we are able to apprehend her from a few pages which show only the smaller part of her: but, with the aid of contemporary witnesses, we are sure at least that, in our attempt to define her, we have not wrongly ascribed anything to her. This elder sister of Saint-Cyr, this sister of Esther, who did not confine herself to that so pleasing part, is the last flower, so to say, produced by the expiring age of Louis XIV, and she showed no traces of the influence of the following age. Coming after the La Fayettees, the Sévignées, the Maintenons, remarked or cultivated by them and admiring them, she resembled them and yet was something apart, shining at a distance in their train, the youngest and the gayest, with her distinct brilliance and a delicacy without any pallor.

THE CONFESSIONS OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

Monday, November 4, 1850.

AFTER speaking of the pure, light, unemphatic, perfectly smooth and fluent language, which the ending seventeenth century had partly bequeathed to the eighteenth, I should like to speak to-day of this language of the eighteenth century, considered in the writer to whom it owed its greatest progress, under whose influence it suffered the greatest revolution since Pascal, a revolution from which we writers of the nineteenth century date our era. Before Rousseau and since Fénelon, there had been many essays in styles of writing which were no longer those of the pure seventeenth century : Fontenelle had his manner, if ever there was a manner ; Montesquieu had his, stronger, firmer, more striking, but still a manner. Voltaire alone had no manner, and his lively, clear, rapid words flowed as if only a few steps from the source. ' You think, he writes somewhere, that I explain myself clearly enough : I am like the little rivulets, transparent because they are shallow '. He said that laughingly ; one does often tell these half-truths to oneself. The century however demanded more ; it wanted to be stirred, warmed, rejuvenated by the expression of ideas and sentiments which it could ill define and yet was searching for. Buffon's prose, in the first volumes of the *Natural History*, offered the age some semblance of what it desired, a more majestic than living image, a little beyond reach, and too closely bound to scientific subjects. Rousseau appeared : on the day when he wholly discovered himself he revealed at the same moment to his age the writer who was best fitted to express with novelty, with power, with a logic tempered by enthusiasm, the confused ideas which were stirring and struggling to see the light. In making this

language his own he had had to conquer and master it, and he forced it a little, he gave it a ply which it was destined to keep henceforth ; but he gave it back more than it lost, and, in many respects, he gave it a new birth and a new vigour. Since Jean-Jacques, it was into the language mould built up and created by him that our greatest writers have cast their own innovations whilst trying to improve upon it. The pure form of the seventeenth century, which we love to recall, has hardly been more than a graceful relic of antiquity and a thing to look back upon for persons of taste.

Although the *Confessions* did not appear until after Rousseau's death and when his influence was already in full sway, it is in them that we can most conveniently study him to-day with all the merits, the fascinations and the defects of his talent. We shall try to do so, limiting ourselves so far as we are able to the consideration of the writer, but without denying ourselves some remarks on the ideas and the character of the man. The present moment is not very favourable to Rousseau, to whom is imputed the authorship and promotion of many of the ills that we are suffering from. ' There is no writer, some one has said judiciously, more calculated to make the poor proud '. In spite of all, in considering him here, we will try as far as possible to keep clear of that personal disposition, as we may call it, which is causing good minds to throw the blame upon him in the painful circumstances that we are now passing through. Men who have such a far-reaching influence and such a morrow should not be judged according to the emotions and the reactions of a day.

The idea of writing his *Confessions* seems so natural to Rousseau and so conformable to his disposition as well as his talent, that one would not think there was any need to suggest it to him. And yet it came to him in the first place from his publisher Rey in Amsterdam, and also from Duclos. After the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, after the *Émile*, Rousseau, at the age of fifty-two, began to write his *Confessions* in 1764, after his departure from Montmorency, during his sojourn at Motiers in Switzerland. There has just been published, in the last number of the *Revue suisse* (October, 1850), an opening chapter of the *Confessions*, taken from a manuscript deposited at the

Neuchâtel Library; this beginning is Rousseau's first rough copy, which he since suppressed. This original introduction, which is much less pompous and bombastic than that we read at the beginning of the *Confessions*, makes no mention of the *trumpet-blast of the Judgment Day*, and does not end up with the famous apostrophe to the *Eternal Being*. Rousseau there expounds at greater length, but philosophically, his purpose in describing himself and making his confessions *in all rigour*; he makes it very clear wherein consists the originality and the singularity of his design:

'No one can write a man's life but himself. His inner manner of being, his true life, is known only to himself; but, in writing it, he disguises it; under the name of his life he writes his apology: he shows himself as he would be seen, not by any means as he is. The most sincere are truthful at most in what they say, but they lie by their reticence, and what they withhold would put such a different face on what they feign to confess, that in telling only a part of the truth, they tell nothing. I place Montaigne at the head of those *sincere hypocrites* who try to deceive by telling the truth. He shows himself with his faults, but he gives himself only pleasing faults: *there is no man who has not some odious ones*. Montaigne paints a good likeness of himself, but only from one side. Who knows but that some scar on his cheek, or a blind eye on the side he conceals, would have totally altered his physiognomy? . . .'

He claims to do then what no one has planned or dared to do before him. As for the style, he thinks that he would have to invent one as new as his project, one adapted to the diversity and the disparity of the things that he proposes to describe:

'If I try to produce a work written with the same care as the others, I shall not portray, I shall disguise myself. It is here a question of painting my portrait and not of writing a book. I am going to work so to say in a *Camera obscura*; it will need no more art than to follow accurately the lines that I see marked. I choose my own path, therefore, with regard to style as well as to matter. I shall not study to make it uniform; I shall always adopt that which comes to me; I shall change it according to my humour, without any scruple; I shall set down everything as I feel it, as I see it, without any searching, without any restraint, without troubling myself whether or not it is motley. In yielding at the same time

to the recollection of the impression received and to my present feeling, I shall doubly depict the state of my soul, namely at the moment when the event occurred to me and at the moment when I describe it ; my style, uneven and natural, now hurried and now diffuse, now sedate and now extravagant, now grave and now gay, will itself form a part of my story. In short, whatever the manner in which this work will be written, it will always be by reason of its subject a valuable book for the philosopher : it is, I repeat, a document for the comparative study of the human heart, *and it is the only one in existence*’.

Rousseau's mistake is not that he believes that by thus confessing himself aloud to all the world, and with a feeling so different from Christian humility, he was doing a unique thing or even a thing of the greatest interest for the study of the human heart ; his error lies in believing that he was doing a *useful* thing. He did not see that he was acting like a physician who should set about describing in an intelligible, fascinating manner, for the benefit of men of the world and the ignorant, some well characterized infirmity or mental malady : that physician would be partly responsible and to blame for all the maniacs and all the madmen by imitation and contagion that his book would produce.

The first pages of the *Confessions* are too accentuated and rather laboured. I find at the very beginning ‘a void occasioned by a defect of memory’ ; Rousseau speaks of the *authors of his days* ; he brings with him at birth the germ of an *incommodity* that the years have *reinforced*, as he says, and which now only occasionally give him any *relaxations*, etc., etc. All that is disagreeable and savours little of that flower of expression that we were breathing and enjoying only the other day under the name of urbanity. But, wait a while, by the side of these harsh accents and these crudities of the soil, what do we find ? what a fresh, familiar, and touching simplicity !

‘ I felt before I thought ; that is the common lot of mankind. I experienced it more fully than any other. I know not what I did before the age of five or six. I know not how I learned to read ; I remember only my first readings and their effect upon me. . . . My mother had left some novels ; we began to read them after supper, my father and I. The original intention was only to give me practice in reading by means of amusing books ; but soon the interest became so keen, that we would read by turns without intermission, and spend the nights in

this occupation. We could never leave off until we had reached the end of the volume. Sometimes my father, hearing the swallows in the morning, would say quite ashamed: *Come to bed, I am more childish than thou* '.

Mark well that swallow ; it is the first, and it announces a new spring for the language ; in Rousseau we see its first appearance. From him dates with us, in the eighteenth century, the feeling for nature. From him too dates in our literature the feeling for domestic life, that poor, middle-class, still, intimate life, in which are amassed so many sweet and virtuous treasures. In spite of a few details of bad tone, when he speaks of pilferings and gluttony (*mangeaille*), how much we pardon him for the sake of that old song of his childhood of which he remembers only the melody and a few incoherent words, but which he is for ever trying to recover, and which he never recalls, old that he is, without a tender charm !

' It is a freak that I cannot understand, he says, but I find it quite impossible to sing it right through without being stopped by my tears. I have intended a hundred times to write to Paris to find the rest of the words, if so be that anybody still knows them ; but I am almost certain that the pleasure I take in recalling that air would vanish in great part, if I had a proof that others have sung it besides my good aunt Suzon '.

There we have the new thing in the author of the *Confessions*, that is what charms us, by opening up quite an unexpected source of intimate and homely sensibility. The other day we were reading together Mme de Caylus and her *Souvenirs* : but of what memories of her childhood does she speak ? what did she love ? what did she weep over on leaving the home where she was born, where she was reared ? Has she ever the remotest thought of telling us ? Those scions of a refined and aristocratic stock, gifted with so exquisite a tact and so keen a sense of raillery, either did not love these simple things, or did not dare to show it. Their mind we know sufficiently and we enjoy it ; but where is their heart ? One must be a bourgeois, and a provincial, and a man of no extraction like Rousseau, to show oneself thus under the sway of the affections of the heart and of nature.

So, when we remark with some regret that Rousseau forced, dug and as it were ploughed the language, we add

at once that he sowed it and fertilized it at the same time.

A man of the proud aristocratic race, but a disciple of Rousseau, who had not much more than he the sense and the fear of ridicule, M. de Chateaubriand, resumed in *René* and in his *Memoirs* that more or less direct manner of admissions and confessions, and obtained from it some magic and surprising effects. Note the differences however. Rousseau has not that elevated station to begin with; he is not quite (and far from it) what we call a *well-born* child; he has a leaning to vice and to the low vices; he has some shameful and concealed cupidities which do not savour of the gentleman; he is long a victim to that sort of timidity which suddenly turns into the effrontery of a *blackguard* (*polisson*) and a *good-for-nothing* (*vaurien*) as he calls himself; in a word, he has not that safeguard of honour, that M. de Chateaubriand had from his early childhood, watching over his faults like a sentinel. But Rousseau, with all these disadvantages, which we are not afraid of calling by their names after his example, is better than Chateaubriand in this sense that he is more human, more tender. He has not that incredible hardness (truly a quite feudal hardness) and those oversights of the heart in speaking of his father and mother for example. When he, Jean-Jacques, is on the subject of the wrongs done him by his father, who, an honest man but a man of pleasure, thoughtless and married again, abandons him and leaves him to his fate, with what delicacy he touches upon this painful subject! how the whole matter is touched by the heart! It is not of chivalric delicacy that I speak, it is the true, inner delicacy, of the delicacy which is moral and human.

It is incredible that this inner moral sense with which he was endowed, and which kept him so strongly in touch with other men, should not have informed Rousseau how far he was falling away from it in many a passage of his life and in many an expression he affects. His style, like his life itself, contracted some of the vices of his early education and of the bad company that he frequented at first. After a childhood respectably spent in the circle of the domestic hearth, he is bound an apprentice and suffers cruelties which corrupt his tone and deprave his sense of delicacy. The words *polisson*, *vaurien*, *gueux*, *fripon* have no terrors for him, and they even seem to

return to his pen with a certain complacency. His speech always retained a trace of the evil tone of his early years. I distinguish two sorts of corruption in his language : one is merely a result of his provincialism, of his speaking a French born outside of France. Rousseau will write without wincing : *Comme que je fasse, comme que ce fût*, etc., instead of saying : *De quelque manière que je fasse, de quelque manière que ce fût*, etc. ; he articulates strongly and with harshness : at times he has a touch of *goître* in his voice. But that is a defect that we can overlook in him, so completely did he succeed in overcoming it on many a happy page, so thoroughly did he, by dint of hard work and emotion, impart flexibility to his voice and succeed in giving to that learned and laboured style the softness and the semblance of a first casting. The other kind of alteration and corruption we may note in him is more serious, in that it has a moral source : he does not seem to suspect that there are certain things which should not be expressed, that there are certain ignoble, unpleasant, cynical expressions, which the gentleman should avoid and ignore. Rousseau was for some time a lackey ; his style shows it in more than one passage. He hates neither the word nor the thing. ' If Fénelon were alive, you would be a Catholic ', Bernardin de Saint-Pierre said to him one day, seeing him touched by some ceremony in the ritual. ' Oh ! if Fénelon were alive, exclaimed Rousseau all in tears, I should try to become his lackey in order to deserve to be his valet de chambre '. We see the lapse from good taste even in the emotion. Rousseau is not only an artisan of the language, an apprentice before becoming a master, showing in places the trace of the weldings : in moral respects he is a man who, in his youth, passed through the most mixed conditions of life, and who can mention certain ugly and unpleasant things without feeling any nausea. I will say no more on this essential vice, on this blot which it is so painful to have to encounter and to denounce in so great a writer and so great a painter, in such a man.

Slow to think, quick to feel, with ardent and suppressed appetites, with daily sufferings and constraints, Rousseau reaches the age of sixteen, and he describes himself in these terms :

' Thus I reached my sixteenth year, uneasy, discontented

with myself and everything, with no liking for my condition, without the pleasures of my age, consumed by desires the object of which I knew not, weeping without any cause for tears, sighing without knowing why; in short, tenderly caressing my chimeras, for want of seeing anything around me to compare with them. On Sundays, my comrades would call for me after the sermon to go and play with them. I would gladly have avoided them if I had been able; but, once started in their games, I was more eager, I went further than they; *difficult to start and to hold*'.

Ever in extremes!—Here we recognize the first form of the thoughts and almost of the phrases of René, of those words which had already become a music and which still ring in our ears:

'I had an impetuous humour and an unequal disposition. By turns noisy and gay, silent and melancholy, I gathered around me my young companions; then, suddenly forsaking them, I would sit aloof and contemplate the fleeting clouds, or listen to the rain falling on the foliage. . . .'

And again:

'Young, I cultivated the Muses; there is nothing more poetical, in the freshness of its passions, than a heart of sixteen. The morning of life is like the morning of the day, full of purity, images and harmonies'.

René, in fact, is no other than this youth of sixteen transposed, removed to the midst of a different nature and in the bosom of another social condition; no longer an engraver's apprentice, son of a bourgeois of Geneva, a bourgeois of the lower order, but a knight, a noble, a traveller on a large scale, enamoured of the Muses: everything, at first sight, puts on a more seductive, a more poetic colour; the unexpectedness of the landscape and the frame heightens the personage and characterizes a new manner; but the first perceptible type is where we have indicated, and it is Rousseau who, looking within himself, found it.

René is a model more flattering to us, because in him all the unpleasant human sides are veiled; he has a tincture of Greece, of chivalry and Christianity, the different reflections of which cross and recross each other on his surface. Words, in this masterpiece of art, have assumed a new magic; words full of light and harmony.

The horizon is widened in every direction, and the ray of Olympus plays upon it. Rousseau has nothing to compare with it at first sight, but he is more true at bottom, more real, more living. This child of trade, who goes to play with his companions after the *preaching*, or goes aside to dream alone if he can, this little youth with his well-shaped figure, his bright eye, his refined physiognomy, which betrays everything more than we should have wished, has more reality than the other and more life; he has a bonhomie, emotion and bowels. Both natures, that of René and that of Rousseau, have a morbid character, too much ardour mingled with inaction and idleness, a predominance of imagination and sensibility which retire within and consume themselves; but of the two Rousseau is the more truly a creature of feeling, he is the more original and the more sincere in his chimerical flights, in his regrets, in his paintings of an ideal of felicity permitted and lost. When, on leaving his native country, at the end of the first book of the *Confessions*, he sets before himself the simple and touching picture of the obscure happiness he might have enjoyed there: when he says:

'I might have passed in the bosom of my religion, of my country, of my family and my friends, a peaceful and sweet life, such as my character needed, in the uniformity of a labour that was to my liking and a society after my heart; I might have been a good Christian, a good citizen, a good father of a family, a good friend, a good workman, a good man in every respect; I should have loved my condition in life, *I might have been an honour to it perhaps*, and, after spending a simple and obscure, but an even and pleasant life, I might have died peaceably in the bosom of my family; soon forgotten no doubt I might have been mourned at least as long as I was remembered'.

When he speaks like that, he convinces us indeed of the sincerity of his wish and his regret: so deep and strong is the sense of the sweet, even and honest charm of private life that breathes through all his words!

So all we, in this century, who have been more or less sick of the malady of revery, let us not imitate those newly created nobles, who deny their grandfather, and let us remember that before being the very unworthy sons of

the noble René, we are more assuredly the grandsons of the bourgeois Rousseau.

The first book of the *Confessions* is not the most remarkable, but it already contains the whole Rousseau, with his conceit, his vices in germ, his odd and grotesque humours, his base and unclean actions (you see that I mark everything) ; with his pride too and that spring of independence and vigour which raises him again ; with his happy and healthy childhood, his suffering and tortured youth, with the tirades against society and the vengeful reprisals which it afterwards inspired (we already feel them coming) ; with his tender sense of domestic and family happiness of which he enjoyed so little, and again with those first puffs of spring and those first breezes, the signal of a natural awakening which will become brilliantly manifest in the literature of the nineteenth century. We are in danger to-day of being too little sensible to those first picturesque pages of Rousseau ; we are so spoiled by colours, that we forget how fresh and new those landscapes appeared at the time, and what an event they formed in the midst of that very intellectual, very refined, but barren society, as devoid of imagination as of true sensibility, destitute in itself of that sap which circulates, and which at every season flowers again. Rousseau was the first to bring back and infuse that powerful vegetable sap into the delicate self-exhausting tree. French readers, accustomed to the artificial air of a drawing-room atmosphere, those *urban* readers, as he calls them, were in a rapture of astonishment at feeling, from the direction of the Alps, those good fresh mountain whiffs, which came to put new life into a literature as distinguished as it was devoid of sap.

It was time, and it is in this respect that Rousseau is not a corruptor of the language, but, all things considered, a regenerator.

Before him, La Fontaine alone, with us, had known and felt to that degree nature, and the charm of dreaming in the open country ; but his example had little influence ; they allowed the *bonhomme* to come and go with his fable, and they remained in the drawing-rooms. Rousseau was the first who forced all that fine society to leave them, and to quit the grand park avenues for the real country walks.

The beginning of the second book of the *Confessions* is delicious and full of freshness. Mme de Warens appears to us for the first time. In depicting her, Rousseau's style becomes softer and is tinged with grace, and we at the same time discover a feature, an essential vein which is in him and his whole manner: I mean sensuality. 'Rousseau had a voluptuous mind', a good critic has said; women play a great part with him; absent or present, they and their charms engross, inspire and soften him, and something of them mingles with everything that he writes. 'How, he says of Mme de Warens, on approaching for the first time an agreeable, polished, *dazzling* woman, a lady of a higher rank than my own, the like of whom I had never come near . . . , how is it that I was at once so free from constraint, as much at my ease as if I had been perfectly sure of pleasing her?' This facility, this ease, which will ordinarily be so little true of him when personally in the presence of women, will always be true of his style when describing them. The most adorable pages of the *Confessions* are those which tell of this first meeting with Mme de Warens, and those again in which he describes his reception by Mme Basile, the pretty tradesman's wife of Turin: 'She was *brilliant* and beautifully dressed, and, in spite of her gracious air, this splendour had awed me. But her kind reception, her compassionate tone, her gentle and caressing manners, soon put me at my ease; I saw that I was making a good impression, and that made me still more successful'. Have you not felt that in this splendour and this brilliant complexion there was a ray of the Italian sun as it were? And he recounts that lively and dumb scene that no one has forgotten—that scene carried on by gestures, and stopped in time, all full of blushes and young desires. Join to this the excursion in the environs of Annecy with the demoiselles Galle and de Graffenried, every detail of which is charming. Such pages were in French literature the discovery of a new world, of a world of sunlight and freshness, which had existed without society having been aware of it; they offered a mixture of sensibility and naturalness, in which the touch of sensuality appeared only so far as was permissible and necessary to free us at last from the false metaphysics of the heart and the conventional cant of immateriality. The sensuality of the brush cannot dis-

please in this degree ; it is still sober and unmasked, which makes it more innocent than that which many painters have displayed since.

As a painter Rousseau always has a sense of *reality*. He has it whenever he speaks of beauty, which, even when it is imaginary as in the case of his *Julie*, assumes with him a body and very visible forms, and is by no means an unreal and impalpable Iris. He has the sense of that reality in that he tries to give a frame to every scene that he remembers or invents, to every person he introduces, and to make them move in a well defined place, in order that the smallest details may engrave themselves on the memory. One of his objections to the great novelist Richardson was that he did not connect the memory of his characters with any locality which one could take a pleasure in recognizing. See too how he succeeded in naturalizing his Julie and Saint-Preux in the Canton Vaud, on the shores of that lake around which his heart never ceased to wander. His judicious and stealthy mind everywhere lends its burin to the imagination, in order that nothing essential may be omitted in the design. In short, he shows that sense of *reality* even in the care with which, amid all circumstances and in his adventures, whether happy or unfortunate, and even the most romantic, he never forgets to mention the meals, the details of a wholesome, frugal fare, calculated to impart joy to the heart and the mind.

This trait is also essential ; it is bound up with that bourgeois nature, that nature of a man of the people that I have noted in Rousseau. He had felt hunger in his life ; he notes in his *Confessions*, with a sense of blessing Providence, the last time when he literally felt hunger and poverty. So he will never forget, even in the ideal picture he afterwards draws of his happiness, to bring in those things of real life and of common humanity, those things of the *entrails*. It is by all these true qualities, combined in his eloquence, that he seizes and holds us.

Nature, sincerely felt and loved for itself, forms the groundwork of Rousseau's inspiration, whenever this inspiration is sound and not morbid. When he meets Mme de Warens again, after his return from Turin, he is installed for a time in her house, and the window of the chamber he is given overlooks gardens and the country :

' Since Bossey (a place where he had been boarded out in his childhood), it was the first time, he says, that I had *green before my windows* '. It had been a matter of great indifference in French literature whether one had or had not *green* before one's eyes; to Rousseau belongs the honour of having first called attention to it. From this point of view we might define him in a few words: he was the first who put *green* into our literature. Residing thus at the age of nineteen with a beloved woman, to whom he does not dare to declare his ardour, Rousseau yielded to a melancholy ' which had nothing gloomy however and was tempered by a flattering hope '. One great holiday, having taken a stroll alone outside the town, while the people were at vespers :

' The ringing of the bells, he said, which has always singularly affected me, the song of the birds, the beauty of the day, the softness of the landscape, the *scattered rustic* houses of which I made in imagination our common dwelling, all this made such a vivid, tender, sad and touching impression upon me, that I was transported in an ecstasy to those happy times and that happy abode where my heart, possessing all the felicity it could desire, tasted it with inexpressible rapture, without thinking even of the pleasure of the senses '.

Such were the feelings of this son of Geneva at Annecy in the year 1731, whilst society in Paris was reading Montesquieu's *Temple de Gnide*. On that day he discovered revery, that new charm which La Fontaine had been allowed to indulge in as an eccentricity, and which he, Rousseau, was to introduce definitely into a literature that had hitherto been dissolute or materialistic. *Revery*, that is his novelty, his discovery, his America. The dream of that day he realized some years later during his stay at Les Carmettes, in that excursion on Saint-Louis' Day, which he described as nothing had been described before :

' Everything seemed to contribute, he says, to the happiness of this day. It had rained shortly before; no dust, and *the rivulets very full*; a little fresh breeze was stirring the leaves, the air was pure, the horizon was cloudless, serenity reigned in the sky as in our hearts. We had our dinner at a peasant's, sharing it with the family, who blessed us heartily. These poor Savoyards are such good people ' !

And he continues, in this strain of bonhomie, of observation and naïve truth, to unfold a picture in which everything is perfect, in which everything enchants, and where only the name *Maman* applied to Mme de Warens offends and pains the moral sense.

That moment, at Les Charmettes, when it was given to that fresh heart to expand for the first time, is the most divine in the *Confessions*, and it will never be repeated, even when Rousseau has retired to the Hermitage. The description of those years at the Hermitage, and of the passion which pursues him there, is very attractive too, and stands out more vividly perhaps than anything that has preceded; he was right, however, when he exclaimed: *This is not Les Charmettes!* The misanthropy and mistrust which have already taken hold of him pursue him in this period of solitude. He continually thinks of the world of Paris, of d'Holbach's coterie; he enjoys his retreat in spite of them, but this thought will poison his purest enjoyments. His character becomes soured and contracts during these years a henceforth incurable malady. He still, no doubt, had some delicious moments then and since, until the end; in the island of Saint-Pierre, in the middle of the Lake of Bièvre, he again enjoys an interval of calm and oblivion which inspire him with some of his finest pages, that fifth Promenade of the *Reveries*, which, together with the third Letter to M. de Malesherbes, cannot be dissociated from the divinest passages of the *Confessions*. However nothing will equal for its lightness of touch, its freshness and brightness, the description of the life at Les Charmettes. Rousseau's true happiness, that which nobody, not even himself, could deprive him of, was to have the power of thus calling up and retracing, with the precision and the brilliancy which he brought to his memories, these pictures of his youth even in his most troubled and disturbed years.

Travelling on foot, with its impressions at every moment, was another of Rousseau's inventions, another of the novelties he imported into literature: it has been much abused since. It did not occur to him until long after he had enjoyed them to relate his feelings. It was only then, he assures us, 'when he was travelling on foot, in fine weather, in a beautiful country, without being hurried', having for the goal of his journeyings a pleasant object

that he was not in too great a haste to reach, it was then that he was quite himself, and that ideas, cold and dead in the study, stirred and soared within him :

' There is something in walking that stirs and quickens my ideas ; I can hardly think when I remain in one place ; my body must be on the move to set my mind going. The sight of the country, the succession of agreeable views, the open air, the big appetite, the good health I win by walking, the freedom of the inn, the absence of everything that makes me feel my dependence, everything that reminds me of my situation, all this loosens my soul, gives me a greater audacity to think, throws me so to say into the immensity of beings to combine them, to choose them, to appropriate them at my will, without fear or constraint. I dispose of all nature like a master. . . .

Do not expect him at these moments to write down the sublime, extravagant, amiable thoughts that cross his mind : he greatly prefers to taste and enjoy them without expressing them : ' Besides, did I carry paper and pens with me ? If I had thought of all that, nothing would have occurred to me. I did not foresee that I should have ideas ; they come when they please, not when I please '. So, in all that he has told since, if we are to believe him, we have only distant recollections and indistinct fragments of himself, as he was in those moments. And yet what is more true, more precise and more delightful at the same time ! Remember that night he spends *at the sign of the Beautiful Star* on the banks of the Rhône or the Saône, in a hollow road near Lyons :

' I lay down voluptuously on the ledge of a sort of recess or false door let into the wall of a terrace ; the tester of my bed was formed by the tree-tops ; a nightingale was just overhead, and I went to sleep to its song ; my slumbers were sweet, my awakening was still more so. It was broad daylight : my eyes, on opening, saw the water, the verdure, a wonderful landscape. I got up and shook myself : I felt hungry ; I wended my way gaily to the town, resolved to spend two pieces of six blanks, that I still had left, in a good breakfast ' .

There we have the whole natural Rousseau with his revelry, his ideal, his reality ; and even that piece of *six blanks*, coming after the nightingale, is not out of place to bring us back to earth and make us realize all the humble enjoyment that poverty conceals within itself when joined

to poetry and youth. I purposely carried the quotation to that piece of six blanks to show that with Rousseau we are not solely in the upper regions of poetry as in *René* and *Jocelyn*.

Rousseau's picturesqueness is sober, vigorous and clear, even in its most fragrant moments; the colour always lies on a well-finished drawing: in that respect this Genevan is indeed of pure French race. If at times he is lacking in a warmer light and the brilliant colouring of Italy or Greece; if, as around that beautiful Lake of Geneva, the air is sometimes cooled by the north-east wind, and if a cloud suddenly casts a greyish tint on the sides of the mountains, there are days and hours of a limpid and perfect serenity. Others have since exceeded his style, thinking to put him in the shade and surpass him; they have certainly succeeded in respect of a few effects of colour and sound. Still, Rousseau's style remains the surest and the most firm that can be offered as an example in the field of modern innovation. With him the centre of the language has not been too much displaced. His successors have gone farther; they have transferred the seat of the Empire not only to Byzantium, they have often carried it to Antioch and to the heart of Asia. With them imagination in its pomp absorbs and dominates everything.

The portraits in the *Confessions* are alive, piquant and witty. Friend Bâcle, the musician Venture, Simon the chief judge, are subtly caught and observed; they are not caught with as much facility as those of *Gil Blas*, they are rather engraved: Rousseau has here recalled to mind his first trade.

I have only been able to point out cursorily the leading features of the author of the *Confessions*, by reason of which he remains a master, to salute on this occasion the creator of the revery, the man who inoculated us with the feeling for nature and the sense of reality, the father of intimate literature and of the painting of interiors. What a pity that pride and misanthropy should have mingled with his work, and that cynical tones should form a blot on so many charming and solid beauties! But these follies and vices of the man cannot prevail against the original merits, or conceal from us the great qualities which still make him superior to his descendants.

CAMILLE DESMOULINS¹

Monday, November 11, 1850.

AFTER showing the perfect language of the age of Louis XIV in its last bloom and elegance in the most charming pupil of Mme de Maintenon, after considering the style of the eighteenth century in the fullness of its power and brilliancy in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I thought of coming at once to the language of the Revolution in the man who is considered to have handled it with most verve and talent, in Camille Desmoulins. Thus we should have the three moments, the three most distinct and opposite tones; and to bring the three into juxtaposition would alone give rise to many thoughts on the nature of perfection, progress or corruption in this matter. One of my honourable brothers in criticism has anticipated me in the *Journal des Débats*², by beginning to speak of Camille Desmoulins, but he has not yet said his last word. I regret having to risk my ideas here before being able to profit by the whole of his. My point of view is besides restricted, and, without avoiding the expression of my thoughts on the political aspect, I shall confine myself as far as I am able to the question of language and good taste.

Camille Desmoulins has left a name which, at a distance, excites interest: the memory of his last act, of those pages of the *Vieux Cordelier*, in which he dared before any other, during the Terror and after having been almost a terrorist himself, to utter the word clemency, the anger he aroused in the tyrants, the cruel immolation which resulted, sanctified him in history as a kind of martyr of humanity, and we are fond of picturing him only in that last movement of the heart and that supreme attitude.

¹ *Biography of Camille Desmoulins.* By E. Fleury (1850).

² M. Cuvillier-Fleury, in his article in the *Journal des Débats* of November 3, which was completed in the issues of November 24 and December 1.

However, if we wish to study him as a man and a writer, and not merely to salute him in passing as a statue, we must consider him from the beginning and in his successive actions and writings. Camille Desmoulins wrote from his prison to his wife: 'My justification is wholly contained in my *eight* Republican volumes. It is a good pillow on which my conscience goes to sleep, awaiting the tribunal and posterity'. Poor Camille! he was labouring under a strange delusion, both with respect to the revolutionary tribunal and to posterity. The *Study* which M. Fleury has just published, and the abundant extracts which he quotes from Camille's journals and pamphlets from 1789 to 1793, are little calculated to do him honour and to raise him in the eyes of posterity—I mean in the eyes of sensible people in all governments and at all times. I desired to verify the texts for myself and to go to the fountain-head. I have here on my table the eight volumes of the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, a journal which Camille published between December, 1789, and the end of 1791—those volumes on which he said he could rest his head and go to sleep with so much confidence: it is, we must admit, a poor kind of pillow. I have also most of his smaller works and pamphlets; and my impression, after perusing them, remains the same as it was after reading M. Fleury's extracts, or rather it is still worse.

I shall not, however, forget Camille Desmoulins' last action. Strange to say! after beginning badly, he ended well. Those who were in the prisons in December, 1793, and January, 1794, have told us over and over again, after their liberation, the impression they received on the appearance of these first numbers of the *Vieux Cordelier*: it was, six months after Thermidor, like a first sunbeam penetrating the prison bars. The man who gave his persecuted and innocent fellow-creatures such a ray of hope, and himself paid the penalty of this good movement with his head and his blood, deserves to be forgiven much; but we must quickly add that he had great need of forgiveness.

Camille Desmoulins, born in 1760 at Guise in Picardy, the son of a Lieutenant-general in the bailiwick of that town, received his education at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, where Robespierre was among his comrades. A relative of his father had procured him a bursary, and he did

credit to it. His literary and classical studies appear to have been excellent and very varied, since he knew as much of antiquity as it was possible for a well-educated young man of that time, one of the good pupils of the University, to know. His revolutionary style is quite spiced and stuffed as it were with quotations from Tacitus, from Cicero, from all the Latin authors, which he continually applies to the circumstances of the day with lightness of heart and an air of semi-parody. That is one of the characteristics of his manner. It was a little strange that a writer who was supposed to be addressing the people in particular should speak Latin on every occasion, and at every moment discharge allusions which could only be understood by those who had been through the college classes. He thought it necessary to justify this practice in one of the first numbers of his Journal (*Les Révolutions de France et de Brabant*):

'I ask your pardon for my quotations, my dear reader. I am quite aware that it looks like pedantry in the eyes of many people; but I have a weak spot for the Greeks and the Romans. It appears to me that nothing can throw so much light upon an author's ideas as these comparisons and images. These chips scattered over my Journal are like illustrations with which my periodical sheet is enriched. As to the sentences that I quote from the ancient writers, convinced of the great good sense of that motto of the Community of Cobblers: *Nihil sub sole novum*, *Nothing new under the sun*, taking one plagiarism with another, I thought it was as good to be the echo of Homer, Cicero and Plutarch, as that of the clubs and coffee-houses, which by the way I hold in great esteem'.

And he did indeed greatly esteem the coffee-houses, and he strangely combines their style and tone with these shreds of Tacitus and the other ancient writers. Speaking, in one of his first writings, of the Café Procope, which was near to the district of the Cordeliers, he said, alluding to the men of wit who came there in the eighteenth century: 'One never enters it without that religious feeling which saved the house of Pindar from the flames. It is true we no longer have the pleasure of hearing Piron, Voltaire, etc.' Piron and Pindar! there we already have Camille Desmoulins in his purity. He enters a coffee-house not without a *religious* feeling, and he will parody the Gospel in a spirit of buffoonery.

Desmoulins was called to the bar : a briefless barrister, he was naturally free and disengaged on the eve of '89, and quite ready to become an agitator, a pamphleteer, and a journalist. He became so at once, and with such verve and spirit, that it is evident that he had always had a calling in that direction. He began however by writing poetry, odes ; he was accused of having written some in honour of the Briennes and the Lamoignons. Here at least is a stanza of an ode which he admits having written, and in which he celebrates M. Necker at the time of the opening of the States-General ; it is written in the solemn tone of the *Ode à Namur* and the odes of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau :

Qu'entends-je ? Quels cris d'allégresse
Retentissent de toutes parts ?
D'où naît cette subite ivresse
Et des enfants et des vieillards ?
Necker descend de la montagne ;
La raison seule l'accompagne ;
En lui le peuple espère encor.
Lois saintes, lois à jamais stables !
Dans ses mains il tient les deux tables !
Il va renverser le veau d'or.

The *mountain* that M. Necker came down was simply Mount Sinai, and not yet the famous mountain to which Desmoulins soon belonged. On Sunday, July 12, 1789, two days before the taking of the Bastille, it was Desmoulins who mounted upon a table in the Palais-Royal, announced the dismissal of Necker to the Parisians, and created that scene which has been so often related, when he drew his sword, displayed his pistols, and put on a green cocade as a sign of emancipation and hope. Desmoulins was, however, not a speaker ; his exterior was not pleasant, his delivery was laborious ; on that day only was he an orator. But what he very soon became and long remained, was the nimblest, the liveliest and most extravagant pen of the Democratic and Anarchical party. He gave the first start to the Revolution ; he never ceased putting his shoulder to the wheel and keeping it in motion, or running and shouting before the car as it hurried along its downward course, until the day when he bethought himself to turn and call out : *Stop !* The car, which he

then warned for the first time, took no heed and crushed him.

His two first pamphlets, anterior to his *Journal*, are *La France libre* and the *Discours de la Lanterne aux Parisiens*. *La France libre* is a purely republican and democratic pamphlet published in 1789. Even after making allowance for the exaltation of the moment, for the intoxication which was rising to almost all heads, and remembering that at one time almost every head was turned; though we prepare ourselves by these considerations, we are still far from the proper frame of mind to approach the reading of this first pamphlet of Camille Desmoulins; we are not yet *at the height* (as they used to say then). The fact is that in many of its parts this pamphlet is not merely mad, it is atrocious. Speaking of the defeat of the enemies of the public good, Camille Desmoulins says, for example:

'They are forced to ask pardon on their knees. Maury is turned out of doors by his host; d'Espréménil hooted even by his lackeys; the Keeper of the Seals reviled and flouted in the middle of his masses; the Archbishop of Paris stoned; a Condé, a Conti, a d'Artois, are publicly devoted to the infernal gods. Patriotism is spreading every day with the accelerated progress of a great conflagration. The young are aflame; the old men for the first time do not regret the past, but blush for it'.

This last touch is that of a writer, but the rest is written by an incendiary. And what shall we say of the following, addressed to those who were not satisfied with the pure zeal of a disinterested patriotism, and who needed a more *powerful* motive of action?

'Never will a richer prey be offered to the victors. Forty thousand palaces, mansions, châteaux; two-fifths of the landed property in France to be distributed as the *reward of valour*. Those who think they are our conquerors will be conquered in their turn. The nation will be purged, and the foreigners, the bad citizens, all those who put their private interests before the general good, shall be *exterminated*. . . .'

It is true that Camille adds immediately afterwards: 'But let us turn aside from these horrors'. He turns aside so little however that, in a note of his pamphlet, he dwells with complacency on the summary execution of the unfortunate de Launay, Flesselles, Foulon

and Berthier : ' What a lesson it is for their fellows, he exclaims, that the Intendant of Paris should come across his father-in-law's head at the end of a broomstick ; and that, an hour later, his own head, or rather the fragments of his head, is seen at the end of a pike ! . . . ' I cut short the odious details. And do not imagine that he shows any indignation in recounting them, that the humanity which awakens in him too late, gives here the smallest sign, shows the least apprehension. He certainly takes care to add : ' But the horror of their crime surpasses the horror of their punishment '. In another passage he extols the prompt justice of the Cobbler of Messina, that man who was ' devoured with zeal for the public good ', who himself executed in the evening, by means of an air-gun, the culprits that he and his workmen had condemned with closed doors in the course of the day. Can we have the heart, in spite of such a pamphlet, to remark a certain activity of talent, a something lively, rapid, cursive, and calculated at the time to carry away unthinking men ?

The second pamphlet, the *Discours de la Lanterne aux Parisiens*, in which Camille justifies the sobriquet he gives himself of *Procurator-general of the Lantern*, is an outcome of the same frenzy. We might wonder perhaps what lantern Camille is thinking of : can it be merely the lantern of Sosie or of Diogenes, the lantern of which he himself said, at the end of his *Réclamation en faveur du marquis de Saint-Huruge* (1789) : ' As for me, gentlemen, nothing can prevent me following you with my lantern and lighting your steps. When so many men are bestirring themselves to bring forward motions in the National Assembly, and in the districts, Diogenes cannot remain the only idle one, and will roll his tub in the city of Corinth. . . . ' Or is it not rather that other and terrible lantern he is thinking of, the one with the broken glass, which threatens to be the gallows of any unpopular street passengers ? We cannot doubt it ; it is this latter that Camille usually has in his mind ; this is the lantern of which he holds the cord in his hand and which he maliciously dangles in mockery before the eyes of his adversaries ; it is this lantern that he plays with like a *spoilt child*, as Robespierre says, and, as we may add, like the insolent, thoughtless and cruel street urchin, who has no sense of good and evil, who has it only when it is too late and spasmodically, and who will perish

by the thing he too often played with. We are inclined to say every moment when reading these mad things, these invectives, these jesting bravadoes of this public insulter who one day ended by being human, and who, on that day, became a victim :

Nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae !

' How ignorant is man of his own destiny and the lot that awaits him to-morrow ' !

Speaking through the mouthpiece of this *Lantern* on the morrow of the night of the Fourth of August, in the midst of a great many eulogies bestowed upon the members of the Assembly and the Parisians, he makes it say :

' It is time that I mingled some just complaints with these eulogies. How many scoundrels have recently escaped me ! Not that I like a too expeditious justice : you know that I gave signs of dissatisfaction on the occasion of the ascension of Foulon and Berthier ; twice I broke the fatal noose. I was very convinced of the treachery and misdeeds of those two rascals ; but the carpenter put too much haste into the business. I should have liked an examination. . . '

You observe the tone, you observe the pretty playfulness and roguery, and how well placed is this gaiety. Cruel and pitiless boy, when will you reach man's age and feel the stirrings of humanity within you ?

In this pamphlet, so execrable in its wit and *tendency*, there are in fact some very lively and clever passages ; there is some real verve. In the middle of the night of the Fourth of August, and whilst privileges are crumbling on all hands, M. de Lally is detected in his flight of royalist sentimentality and his exclamation of *Vive le Roi ! vive Louis XVI restaurateur de la Liberté française !*

' It was then two hours after midnight, and the good Louis XVI, who was no doubt in the arms of sleep, little expected this proclamation ; he little expected to receive a medal at his rising, and to be made, with all his Court, to sing a tiresome *Te Deum* for all the good he had just done. Monsieur de Lally, *nothing is beautiful but the true* ' !

M. Target having commenced a harangue to the King with these words : ' Sire, we bring to the feet of Your Majesty ', they call out : *A bas les pieds ! (Down with the feet !)*. This same M. Target had demanded a respite for

the abolition of fishing rights, and received an address of thanks from the *eels of Melun*: 'Frenchmen, thereupon exclaims Camille Desmoulins, you are always the same people, gay, amiable, sly and mocking. You utter your lamentations in vaudevilles, and you give your votes in the districts to the tune of *Malbroug*'! In this celebration of the night of the Fourth of August, Camille strikes up a sort of hymn in which he begins by parodying the Church hymns, and ends with a reminiscence of the Aphrodisia:

'*Hæc nox est* . . . this is the night, you ought to say, Frenchmen, rather than the night of Easter eve, on which we have escaped from the miserable bondage of Egypt. This is the night which has exterminated all the boars and rabbits, and all the game which was devouring our crops. This is the night which has abolished the tithe and the priests' perquisites. This is the night which has abolished the annats and the dispensations. . . . The Pope will no more levy a tax on the innocent caresses of cousins. The lecherous uncle . . .'

But this is becoming too lively. And he goes on for two pages in this tone of a *noël* and a litany:

'O night disastrous to the Grand Chamber, to the greffiers, the ushers, the procurators, the secretaries, the under-secretaries, the soliciting beauties, porters, valets de chambre, advocates, king's men, to all the plundering crew! Night disastrous to all the leeches of the State, the financiers, courtiers, cardinals, archbishops, abbots, canons, abbesses, priors and subpriors! But, O charming night, *o vera beata nox*, for a thousand young recluses, Bernardines, Benedictines, Visitandines, when they will be visited. . . .'

There we see Camille beginning to reveal himself with his saturnalian tastes, his republic of the *Land of Cockayne* as he dreams it, that republic which he almost inaugurated on July 12, in the middle of the Palais-Royal, and which in his imagination will always savour of that place. In order that Paris may entirely resemble Athens, and that the porters of the Port-au-Blé may be as polite as the herb-sellers of the Piræus, it is only a matter, with him, of suppressing all police administration and allowing the hawkers to cry their newspapers openly. That will be Camille's eternal and sole recipe for universal happiness: to permit everything, to give full licence to do, or at least

to say anything. It is he again who will say, though he has returned to a sort of repentant state in his *Vieux Cordelier*: 'I shall die with this opinion, that to make France republican, happy and flourishing, a little ink and a single guillotine would have sufficed'. He means apparently Louis XVI's guillotine!

Camille, the future writer of the *Vieux Cordelier*, already exhibits in this pamphlet of *La Lanterne* the full nature of his talent and his drolleries. He strides from one epoch to another, he couples names which are most astonished to find themselves together, Louis XVI and the great Theodosius, M. Bailly and the *Mayor of Thebes* Epaminondas. It is a mad, indiscreet, facetious, irreverential verve, an uncontrolled shamelessness, traversed by a few good sallies. He has strings of words, floods of rigmarole which carry the reader off his feet. This journalist is something of a Figaro, something of a Villon. He is a Clerk of the Basoche, mounted on a coffee-house table and raised to the importance of a political agitator. Have you ever seen one of those impudent street urchins marching at the head of a regimental band on a day of departure, mimicking the drum and the fife, especially mimicking the drum-major? Camille Desmoulin is this improvised *fifer* of the Revolution, who will continue to trifle until the day when he learns to his cost that one cannot with impunity play with the tiger. I am told that M. Michelet called him a *blackguard of genius* (*polisson de génie*); I think that it is quite enough, after reading his *Discours de la Lanterne* and his *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, to call him a blackguard of verve and talent.

I should find it only too easy to prove all that by examples; when I say *too easy*, I am boasting, for it would be difficult and generally impossible to quote him, by reason of the cynicism and the coarseness of the passages, even when he is witty. I do not deny that at the bottom of this shamelessness and this exaltation there is a sense of patriotic inspiration, if you like, of sincere love of modern liberty and equality. Perhaps, in the attack upon the *ancien régime* and for the complete overthrow of the feudal bastille, there was a need for those giddy-brained *fifers* and those forlorn hopes at the head of the regimental sappers; but to us who read them to-day there is a too apparent absence of good sense on every page; when

reason appears it is mixed up with strings of follies. We find not so much a heart that is really warmed as a brain in ebullition; we might think that the writer has lighted embers in his head which keep unceasingly whirling and leave him no peace.

Mirabeau, with his superiority, at once saw the use that could be made of this ardent young man, and the necessity at least of not making an enemy of him; he took him with him to Versailles, employed him for a fortnight as his secretary, then looked after him at a distance, and impressed him with such an idea of his genius, that, later, when he was entirely emancipated and in full revolt, Camille still respected the great tribune, even when he mingled some inevitable insults with his admiration.— 'You have a better knowledge than I of principles, Mirabeau said to him one day with flattery, but I have a better knowledge of men' ¹.

Danton followed Mirabeau's example, he took the young man in hand and kept him to the last under his ascendancy. Camille, in fact, was no more than a pen, a creature of verve and petulance made to be at the service of a stronger head than his own.

In the sixteenth century, under the League, there was a set of preachers whose sermons were full of buffooneries and burlesque satire, some of them gifted with a certain popular talent, who preached anarchy and insurrection in the market-places and in the Saint-Eustache quarter: those were the democratic journalists of the day. In the Revolution Camille Desmoulins played the rôle of these preachers; like them he was a wag and a jester, and like them he would stuff his speeches with Latin quotations, travestied and applied to the circumstances of the day.

The *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* (1789-91) is no more than a long and continuous insult of all the public powers which the first Constitution tried to establish or to preserve by regenerating them; it was no more than a defamation, generally calumnious, of all the men who

¹ We read in Mirabeau's sixth secret Note for the Court, dated July 1, 1790: 'As Desmoulins appears to be a member of the secret directory of the Jacobins for the Federation, and as *this man is very accessible to money*, it will be possible to know more about it'. (Vol. ii. p. 68, of the *Correspondence between the Comte de Mirabeau and the Comte de La March*, 1851.) Such a piece of testimony cannot be disputed: Mirabeau thoroughly knew his Desmoulins.

were then in the public eye, and whom Camille Desmoulins praised and exalted at one moment only to degrade and vilify the next. The degree of licence and invective here indulged in by a writer who, from a distance and *relatively*, may still pass for moderate, exceeds all the bounds of our imagination. A number of this journal appeared every Saturday, with an engraving which was most frequently a caricature. The author who alludes, in his title of *Revolutions of Brabant*, to the revolution which was then being attempted in the Belgian provinces, concerns himself by the way with everything that is calculated to excite curiosity in France: 'Every book, he says in his prospectus, from the folio to the pamphlet; every drama, from *Charles IX* to *Polichinelle*; every body, from the Parliaments to the Brotherhoods; every citizen, from the President of the National Assembly, representing the legislative power, to M. Sanson, *representative of the executive power*, will be subjected to our weekly review'. M. Sanson was the executioner. Always in Camille the same kind of pleasantry which *grazes the guillotine*; always that same gesture of a cruel and mischievous monkey delighting in pointing at the edge of the axe!—This beginning of the prospectus is promising, and the writer keeps his promise well enough. If we were to consider this journal to-day merely as evidence of a distant past, as a *mazarinade* of the time of the Fronde, we might pick out, as interesting from a literary point of view, some piquant portraits and lively caricatures: whenever the author feels his verve cooling, he renews it and revives his appetite by cutting a slice out of the Abbé Maury or Mirabeau-Tonneau. He is very amusing when speaking of certain people, but in speaking of others he is too often odious and infamous: I know no better words. Others will with their own hands erect the scaffold for Bailly; but no one made greater preparations for it than he; no one, we may say, did more towards preparing the evidence. Camille is a type and a mouthpiece of those generations which, on entering upon life, have no respect whatever for the things or persons that have preceded them. He said in his *La France libre*: 'Death annuls every right. It is for us who live, who are now in possession of the earth, to make laws in our turn'. But, as one is never in complete possession of this earth, as there

is never a completely clean slate, we must expel those who are too long in making room for us and are in our way : that is the work which Camille undertakes in his *Journal*, to which he never ceases to devote himself, cynically, by decrying all who have virtue, knowledge and moderation in the Constituent Assembly, and by demolishing that Assembly day by day in the ensemble of its labours as well as in each of its influential members.

And let it not be alleged in his favour that he has the excuse of ignorance and thoughtlessness. He knows very well what he is doing ; he has the genius of the newspaper ; he knows the power of the instrument he is wielding, and which nothing can resist, as he says, in the long run. He excites public opinion and passions in the direction in which they wish to be excited, and he boasts of being always six months, or even eighteen months, ahead of his time. He has the instinct of the attack : with a glance he has divined the vulnerable or the ridiculous spot in his adversary, and to him every means of overthrowing him are lawful.

At the very beginning, on the occasion of the so-called *Decree of the silver mark*, which imposed certain conditions of income upon those who were qualified for election to the Assembly, Camille declares that this decree submits France to an *aristocratic government*, ' and that it is the greatest victory that the *bad citizens* have won in the Assembly : in order to realize, he adds, all the absurdity of this decree, it is enough to remember that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Corneille, Mably, would not have been eligible '. And following his detestable habit of not respecting others' beliefs, he apostrophizes the priests who voted for the decree ; after many an insulting epithet, he calls out : ' Do you not see that your God would not have been eligible ' ? and he continues to bring the name of Jesus into his invective. Then, openly parading his theory, subversive of all constituted power, he adds : ' You know my profound respect for the sacred decrees of the National Assembly ; I only speak so freely of *this one* because I do not regard it as a decree '. So, he reserves to himself the right of choosing those of the decrees of the Assembly which meet with his approval, and to regard the others as null and void, under the pretext that they were voted by a majority formed of members of the clergy and

the nobility, who were more numerous in the Assembly than they should be. Not content with that, he asks what would have happened if, on the rising of the Assembly, the members who had voted for the decree had been assaulted by the people, who might say: 'You have just cut us off from society, because you were the stronger in the house; we in our turn will cut you off from the number of the living, because we are the stronger in the street; you have killed us civilly, we kill you physically'. It is true, Camille adds that if the people had attempted to carry out their threat, 'if the people had picked up stones, he would have opposed the stoning with all his powers'. It would have been time indeed to interfere and shout *Stop!* after having prepared the catastrophe. Just as Camille distinguishes between *decree* and *decree*, he distinguishes between *insurrection* and *stoning*. Try to draw a line of conduct between those two words.

Observe that the writer who professes this theory, the most immoral of theories socially and even humanly speaking, is the same who in his first number quotes Cicero's treatise *Of Duties* as the *masterpiece of common-sense*: that is only another inconsistency.

A few passages of a rather elevated tone, a few sincere pages on Milton as a pamphleteer and publicist (in the fourth number), or again the conclusion of a letter from Camille to his father (in the seventh number), cannot induce us to close our eyes either to these detestable theories or to the pasquinades and insults with which Camille thinks himself entitled to pursue men most worthy of being honoured. He accepted, nay, he took upon himself at that time the part of a public accuser and an *informeur* which he afterwards stigmatized. In a controversy with La Harpe, he was not afraid of saying:

'I am endeavouring to rehabilitate this word *délation*. . . . It is to our advantage in the circumstances that this word *délation* should be held in honour, and we will not allow M. de La Harpe, in his capacity as an Academician, to abuse his authority over the Dictionary, and load a word with opprobrium because it displeases M. Panckoucke'.

We should set these words over against the third number of the *Vieux Cordelier*, which expiates them.

André Chénier had published, in August, 1790, an *Avis*

aux Français sur leurs véritable Ennemis (Warning to Frenchmen against their real Enemies), in which he attempted, with the moderation and firmness which distinguished his noble pen, to draw a line of separation between real patriotism and the spurious exaltation which drives men to extreme courses. He said : ' The National Assembly has committed errors because it is composed of human beings . . . ; but it is the last anchor that holds us and prevents our breaking on the rocks '. He had stigmatized, without mentioning any names, but in energetic and burning terms, those spurious friends of the people who under ostentatious titles and with convulsive demonstrations captured their confidence in order to urge them to a universal destruction ; ' people to whom every law is onerous, every check intolerable, every government odious ; people to whom honesty is the most grievous of all yokes. They hate the ancien régime, not because it was bad, but because it was a régime '. Would you believe it ? Camille Desmoulins recognized himself without any hesitation in this portrait, and in his forty-first number, attacking the men of the *Society of 1789* who separated themselves from the club of the Jacobins, he spoke of their manifesto as of the work of ' *I know not what André Chénier* who is not the Chénier of *Charles IX* '. Poor Camille (this exclamation will often escape me) ! the following page referring to him has been found in André Chénier's letters, and it is a judgment :

' My friends, writes André Chénier, have called my attention to a certain number 41 of the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* ; I had already, on other occasions, read some pieces out of this journal, in which some often atrocious absurdities were followed by some rather amusing nonsense ; I was still more diverted by this number 41, in which the author lavishes his honourable insults upon the whole *Society of '89*, and upon me in particular. He extracts and quotes from my work all the severe names which I had applied to the mischief-makers, calumniators, corruptors and enemies of the people, and takes them all upon himself. He says : See how we are treated, see what he says of us.—This naïveté of conscience appeared to me more amusing than anything I had hitherto read of his, and you too, if you had read him, could not have helped laughing as I did at a man who, finding that in a book which mentions no names, a large number of authors are, from their writings, from facts, from a long succession of proofs, branded as

sedition disturbers of the peace, as starveling mischief-makers, as men of blood, recognizes himself in the portrait, and openly declares that he sees himself to be the person referred to. I must confess that I was astonished at such imbecility in a man who, as I have been assured, is not destitute of wit. I then consulted my friends, and asked them whether I ought to reply and confound his nonsense, to make him blush for his evident dishonesty, and destroy, to the best of my power, the poison with which his writing is filled: they observed to me with one accord that when an author mutilates or falsifies everything he quotes, distorts its meaning, and ascribes to you intentions which it is evident that you never had, a man of honour is not bound to reply, since it is beneath a man of honour to take up the pen against a man to whom one can only answer by giving him the direct lie: that to try to make him blush is a foolish undertaking which passes the power of man; that to try to destroy the effect of his speeches is unnecessary, since this man is too well known to be dangerous; that, even in what he calls his party, he is only regarded as a buffoon, sometimes a rather amusing buffoon, and that he could hardly be despised by anybody more than he is by his own friends, for his friends know him better than anybody else. I have yielded to their reasons, whose force and truth I have felt'.

This terrible page of Chénier, the judgment of an honourable man, deserves to be attached to the eight volumes of the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* as a stigma which is their due. The fact that both of them, Camille Desmoulins and André Chénier, were finally victims, is no reason for confounding them; we must give each his due, and maintain at his true rank in public esteem the man who, in times of violence, cowardice and frenzy, was among the small number of men who never deviated.

Meanwhile the Republic so often prophesied by Camille had come: on the morrow of the Tenth of August, he was raised, or, as he puts it, *hoisted* with Danton (*hoisted*, always the street urchin and the greasy pole!) to the Ministry of Justice as Secretary-General. He left it with him and followed the same line of conduct in the Convention. He continued as a pamphleteer his trade of informer. In his *Brissot démasqué*, especially in his *Histoire des Brissotins*, he accuses the whole Gironde; he endeavours to prove those whom he insultingly calls *Brissotins*, to have been conspirators, royalists, instruments of intrigue and venality. He says pleasantly of

Brissot : ' I am angry with myself for having been so long in seeing that Brissot was the dividing wall between Orleans and La Fayette, like the wall of Pyramus and Thisbe, between whose cracks the two parties never ceased to communicate '. With these and similar courtesies, which would hardly be in place in a dramatic feuilleton, did the mad Camille contribute more and more to deprave public opinion and drive victims under the knife. He arrogantly pointed to all the parties, hitherto in conflict, successively destroying each other, until the day when the last of the vanquished succumbed at the feet of their friends and his :

' It is thus that by turns were vanquished, Maury the Royalist, by Mounier-les-deux-Chambres ; Mounier-les-deux-Chambres, by Mirabeau-le-Veto-absolu ; Mirabeau-le-Veto-absolu, by Barnave-le-Veto-suspensif ; Barnave-le-Veto-suspensif, by Brissot, who desired no other veto but his own and that of his friends ; all these rogues swept away from the Jacobins, each by the other, have at last made room for Danton, Robespierre, Lindet, those deputies of all the departments, mountaineers of the Convention, the rock of the Republic '.

Camille thought himself one of the most solid parts of that immovable rock which seemed to say to the waves : ' You shall not come any nearer ' !

The execution of the Girondists, in October '93, was a great blow to him. It is related that he almost swooned on hearing their death sentence, and that he called out : ' It is I who have killed them ' ! Feelings of humanity at last got the upper hand in him, and, finding them in harmony with his party interests, he resumed his journalist's pen to publish (December '93) the first numbers of the *Vieux Cordelier*.

Any one who knows this celebrated pamphlet only by reputation and begins to read it, needs some reflection in order to perceive that it is a return to good sense, to ideas of moderation and justice. One might think at first that it was written under Robespierre's direct inspiration, so superabundant is its praise of that ambitious and wicked man, so bombastically is his *sublime* eloquence cried up. To make his new moderation pass muster, Camille feels it more than ever necessary to disguise it in the red cap of Liberty ; he is not even ashamed of putting it under the patronage of Marat, whom he dares to call *divine*. Two

years before he had been less polite to that fanatic, when during a controversy he had with him, he said :

' In vain dost thou insult me, Marat, as thou hast been doing the last six months. I declare to thee that, as long as I see thee raving in the direction of the Revolution, I shall persist in praising thee, because I think that we must defend liberty, like the city of Saint-Malo, not only with men, *but with hounds* '.

Marat is apparently much better treated in the *Vieux Cordelier* ; but we can understand why, and that it is only due to oratorical precaution and tactics. Be that as it may, in the whole of this opening of the *Vieux Cordelier* we perceive the man who has strayed so far from the right road, that, in order to return to it, he is absolutely obliged to wade back through the mud and mire.

He has to wade back through blood, and not only to celebrate the Marats, the Billaud-Varennes, but repeatedly to salute the guillotine of January 21, and exclaim in an heroic tone : ' I was a revolutionary before you all ; I was more : I was a *brigand*, and I glory in the fact '.

How great must have been the aberration and the frenzy, when such things were regarded as reasonable and worth mentioning, and when they appeared to indicate a return to a better frame of mind !

Everything is relative, and Camille, the anarchist of yesterday, in his struggle with the wretched Hébert, represents in truth civilization and almost the genius of society, like Apollo in his struggle with the serpent Python.

It required devotion and courage to write, in his second number : ' Marat has gone to the extreme point of *patriotism*, there is nothing beyond. Beyond Marat there can be only frenzy and extravagance, there are only *deserts and savages, icebergs and volcanoes*.' He was very long in perceiving that the Revolution must have a limit, but he did perceive it and he admitted it.

The third number indicates Camille's thoughts more distinctly : on the pretext of translating Tacitus, and of enumerating after him all the *suspects* of the tyranny of the emperors, he draws up, under a transparent veil, the table of the suspects of the Republic. Here, under an air of mockery and parody, he becomes seriously eloquent and decidedly courageous. In the fourth number he goes

still further, and he utters his decisive word : ' I think very differently from those who tell you that we must leave *terror* on the order of the day. I am certain, on the contrary, that liberty would be consolidated, and Europe vanquished, if you had a *Committee of Clemency*'. The word is out ; he will try afterwards to explain it, to modify and weaken it : but the cry of all hearts has responded to it, and the anger of the tyrants will respond to it no less.

To Camille belongs the honour of having been the first to dissociate himself from the persecutors and terrorists, and to say : ' No, Liberty . . . is not a courtesan of the Opera, it is not a Phrygian cap, a dirty shirt and rags. Liberty is happiness, reason. . . . Would you have me acknowledge her, fall at her feet, and shed all my blood for her ? Open the prison doors to those two hundred thousand citizens whom you call *suspects*. . . .' Such cries redeem many sins, especially when they are uttered aloud and by one man, in the midst of that dull insensibility of the crowd and that *unfeeling security* which he forcibly stigmatizes and this time with a word truly worthy of Tacitus.

After that do not expect of Camille, in these numbers, any good taste or a sustained tone. Even if he were conscious of those qualities, he would be obliged to imitate in words the shamelessness around him, the more so because he tries for the first time to avoid it in action. But it costs him no effort to conform to it ; except that in one or two passages he exhibits an exaltation which comes from the heart, and an excellent spirit, he is in the *Vieux Cordelier* what he was in his preceding writings, incoherent, indecent, coupling together *ad nauseam* the most incongruous images and names, as Moses and *Ronsin*, profaning at his pleasure names that are held in reverence, speaking of the *sans-culotte* Jesus at the same time that he appears to rise up against the unworthy masquerade of the apostate Bishop Gobel ; in a word, he speaks in the *Vieux Cordelier* the cant of the time ; his style is neglected and careless, without any dignity, without that self-respect and respect for others which is the characteristic of well-regulated epochs and the law of healthy souls, even in the moral extremities into which they may be thrown.

I have said that, in one passage of the *Vieux Cordelier*,

Camille has a moment of true elevation ; it is in the fifth number, when he holds his life cheap and shows himself at length ready to sacrifice it for the cause of humanity and justice ; it is when, addressing his colleagues of the Convention, he exclaims :

'O my colleagues, I will say to you as Brutus said to Cicero : *We are too much afraid of death, banishment and poverty. Nihilum timemus mortem et exilium et paupertatem.* Does this life deserve that a representative of the people should prolong it at the cost of honour ? There is not one of you but has reached the summit of the mountain of life. It only remains for us to descend it by a thousand precipices, unavoidable even for the most obscure of men. This descent will present no unknown landscapes, no spots so delightful but that they appeared a thousand times more so to that Solomon who said in the midst of his seven hundred wives, and whilst treading under foot all this furniture of happiness : *I have found that the dead are happier than the living, and that the happiest of all is he who has never been born*'.

But remark how little he keeps up that elevation of the commencement, and how Solomon comes in and spoils it all with his *furniture of happiness*. The street urchin that we know, the rogue with his unbridled and libertine imagination, returns to mock even in the midst of his emotion. It is perpetually thus with Camille ; he is the man who will associate to the last under his pen Pindar and Piron (as we have seen), Corneille and friend Matthew, the Palais-Royal (Dieu me pardonne !) and the Gospel.

I might still quote the following page of this fifth number of the *Vieux Cordelier*, which is however more irreproachable, and really eloquent : it begins with these words : 'Let us occupy ourselves, my colleagues, not with defending our lives like a sick man. . . ' It is even the only really fine page of this *Vieux Cordelier*, which, in the most disastrous of crises which a great nation passed through, assuredly deserves to live as a generous sign, of regret and repentance, but which will never gain a place among the works that the human mind can glory in.

That place is reserved for healthy works ; works that are free from these strange amalgams of thought and language ; works in which patriotism and humanity suffer no compromise with men of blood, and do not indulge, as a passport and a diversion, in those indecencies of the

Regency and the Directoire periods ; for works in which the moral conscience and literary taste are not offended and made to blush at seeing *Loustalot* and *Marat*, for example, grotesquely, shamelessly quoted between Tacitus and Machiavelli on the one hand, and Thrasybulus and Brutus on the other.

After the reading of these motley pages, all stained with mud and blood, and convulsive, a living image (even in the best passages) of the disorder prevailing in morals and minds, how we feel the need of returning to some judicious book in which good sense rules, in which good language is only the expression of an honest, delicate nature, and of a virtuous habit ! We lie back in our chair and exclaim : O for the style of honest men, of the men who have respected all that is worthy of respect, who find in the feelings of the heart the principle and measure of good taste ! O for the polished, moderate and pure writers ! O for the Nicole of the *Essais* ! O for Daguesseau writing the life of his father ! O for Vauvenargues ! O for Pellisson !

I have only a few more words to say of Camille Desmoulins. He died on the scaffold on April 5, 1794. His young wife followed him a week after, also a victim. Camille was married on December 29, 1790, to this young Lucile, whom he loved. Of *sixty* persons, deputies, journalists, who signed the marriage contract, there remained to him in December, '93 (at the moment when he commenced the *Vieux Cordelier*), only *two friends*, Danton and Robespierre : all the rest, at this date, had emigrated, were incarcerated or guillotined. He had had *five* witnesses at his marriage, Pétion, Brissot, Sillery, Mercier, and that dear Robespierre as always ; these five witnesses had on that day dined with the young couple, and formed a little family gathering. We know what became of them. All these people who assisted at the wedding (except Mercier, who only escaped death through being in prison), all perished by a violent death, including the *young couple*, and all at the hands of that other guest, that dear M. de Robespierre. The hyena had entered the fold, and, through the mere instinct of its nature, had strangled all.

VAUVENARGUES

Monday, November 18, 1850.

LET us return with Vauvenargues to purity of language, to serene thoughts and moral integrity. In the middle of the eighteenth century there was a man, young and already mature, with a great heart and a mind made to embrace everything, who had formed himself and derived no vanity from the fact, proud and modest at the same time, stoic and tender, speaking the language of the great men of the preceding century, that language which seemed in his case to be but the natural and necessary expression of his own thoughts; sincerely and freely religious without any defiance, without any preaching; in a word, reconciling in his person many opposite qualities of nature and showing them in harmony. This rare man died at the age of thirty-two, after publishing a small volume of *Reflections and Maxims* which has since been more or less happily enlarged, but which already contained his whole self with all the germs indicating genius. Since then the name of Vauvenargues has grown by degrees, his noble and amiable figure has become more and more distinctly outlined in the eyes of posterity. The most distinguished and the most diverse minds have won honour by concerning themselves with him. Voltaire first made him known to the world with a feeling of respect, a rare thing with him, and which he felt in the same degree for no other of his contemporaries. M. Suard chose him for the subject of the longest and most animated of his writings. Mlle de Meulan (Mme Guizot) appraised with a few clear touches and classed according to his rank this successor of La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère. M. Thiers made his début with a Eulogy of Vauvenargues, which gained the prize of the Academy of Aix, and of which we know only some fragments remarkable for their fullness and

intelligence. M. Villemain, after La Harpe, in his course of lectures on the eighteenth century, stopped with pleasure before this powerful and modest physiognomy. To-day we can only fittingly recall and re-echo on Vauvenargues what has been better said by so many good judges, and I have no other desire.

The Marquis de Vauvenargues, sprung from a noble family of Provence, was born in 1715, and died in 1747; he entered the army early and became a captain in the King's regiment. He liked the profession of arms, believing that man is made for action; in an age when frivolities, effeminacy and corruption were invading the young nobility, he attached a precise sense, an antique meaning, to those words *valour* (*vertu*) and *glory*: 'Glory adorns the hero, he thought. No glory is complete without that of arms'. He served as long as he was able; he served in campaigns in Italy and Germany, and gave up the active career only when his frail health, exhausted by hardships, betrayed him. Meanwhile, alone, in the leisure moments of the garrisons and in winter quarters, he was continually engaged in serious studies and letters; with the aid of a few good books added to much reflection, he had matured his thoughts, and with pen in hand had endeavoured to give expression to them: 'If you would gather and sift your ideas, was his advice, the result of experience, if you would bring them under one point of view and reduce them to principles, first throw them on paper. Though you should have gained nothing by this habit from the side of reflection, which is manifestly wrong, what would you not gain from the side of expression! Let them say what they will who regard this study as beneath them'. He, so enamoured of fame and action, who felt he had an inborn capacity for war and politics, appears to have needed some reasoning to turn him aside from those pursuits and to tread the path of the author. Vauvenargues had on the subject of blood nobility not exactly prejudices, but lofty ideas which made him regard it as an institution which sanctified the merit and virtue of one's ancestors and imposed them as an inheritance upon their descendants. Now, it was in the public service of the State, it was through actions rather than through writings that opportunities offered themselves to prove that inheritance. However, when he saw that his health was breaking down,

and that his hopes were ruined in consequence and no less by reason of the coolness of a Court that was insensible to true merit, he felt that the only resource left to a nobly ambitious mind was to turn in the direction of 'the fame that is the least borrowed and the most our own that we know of'. The great examples of Richelieu, La Rochefoucauld, de Retz, Sir William Temple, and all those statesmen and men of action who had sought in their writings an increase and a seal to their fame, occurred to him and gave him courage. His genius spoke to him; a commonplace profession did not seem to him worthy to be placed in the scales with that new destiny which he held in his hands: 'It is better, he thought, to derogate from one's quality than from one's genius'; and, going back to the great actions that it had been given to others more fortunate than he to carry into execution, he said to himself: 'Let it appear at least, by the expression of our thoughts and by that which is in our power, that we were not incapable of conceiving them'.

This ruling and ever present preoccupation with action and virtuous energy, superior and preferable to the idea itself, is one of the marks of Vauvenargues' literary talent, and it helps to impart to the least of his words a value and a reality which they would not have in so many others who are nothing more than authors. With him we feel, on the other hand, that the spirit has become fixed into the condition of thoughts and maxims, only for want of opportunity to display and manifest itself in action. And then we have every reason to say truly with him: 'The maxims of men disclose their hearts'.

He had not yet published anything when he announced himself to Voltaire in a letter written from Nancy (April, 1743), in which he submitted to his judgment a literary comparison he had made between Corneille and Racine. Nothing could be more to the honour of Voltaire's good taste and heart than the promptness with which he at once discerned the talent and the man who presented himself to him for the first time. In replying to him with a little literary advice, in quietly correcting and enlightening him upon several points, he at once speaks to this young officer of twenty-eight as to an equal, to a friend, to one of those who are at the head of the small number of judges in literature. As soon as he knows him better,

the word *genius* is frequently associated under his pen with that of Vauvenargues, and that is the only term indeed that truthfully expresses the idea we form of that simple, elevated, original talent, born of itself, and so little affected by surrounding influences.

Vauvenargues had given in his resignation as Captain in the King's regiment, and the hope of seeking compensation in the diplomatic career had been entirely disappointed by the complete breakdown in his health, when he came to Paris to live and devote himself entirely to letters. That must have been at the end of 1745 or the beginning of 1746. Marmontel, a very young man at the time, who saw much of him in that year, has described him to the life with his kindness and affability, his *rich simplicity*, his patience in suffering, his unchangeable serenity and his great good sense without any bitterness. Vauvenargues was established at the Tours mansion, in the Rue du Papon (near the Rue de l'École de Médecine). Voltaire, now in Paris, now at Versailles, was then in his transitory vein of favour at Court, trying to push his fortunes there through the protection of the favourite mistress, and he must have often blushed before Vauvenargues for these distractions and pursuits, so unworthy of the friend of a sage. In the spring of 1746 was published, without the name of the author, the *Introduction to the Knowledge of the Human Mind*, followed by *Reflections and Maxims*. This edition is the only one published by Vauvenargues himself; he died in the following year, while the second edition was being printed. With this first little volume before my eyes, without the disconnected and rather confused additions which have since been made, it seems to me that we can much better grasp in its just lines the generation of his ideas and the formation of his talent.

Less of a painter than La Bruyère, Vauvenargues has a greater design, a more philosophical design: he proposes not merely to observe the men of society in their varieties, to give us portraits, finished miniatures of them, to make them the subject of deep and vivacious remarks; he envisages man himself, and would try to reach a point of view where many maxims, which were thought to be contradictory, unite and agree. The mind of man appears to him in general more penetrating than consistent, and as ordinarily embracing more than it can bind. His,

Vauvenargues', ambition is to bind and to unite. He proposes to go to the roots and principles of things, and to that end he will, in his own expression, traverse *every part of the mind* and every part of the soul. In a first book he treats of the *mind* properly speaking, and of its principal branches, imagination, reflection and memory ; in the second book he treats of the *passions* ; in the third he treats of *moral good and evil*, in other words, of virtues and vices.

Among the persons who have most frequently perused Vauvenargues and who are fond of quoting thoughts of his, we venture to assert that there are few who have accurately studied this first part of his writings, and who have really tried to find out his true theory. The author has there accumulated and linked together a series of definitions, so concise and the result of so much reflection, that we are at a loss how to extract and analyse, how to divide what is already so substantial and dense an extract. 'I venture to compare his principles, says Marmontel, to the primary elements of the chemists which cannot be analysed'. Without here entering into a discussion which would not be much in place, I shall content myself with extricating Vauvenargues' idea in its greatest generality.

In the seventeenth century, the moralists, whether quite Christian moralists, like Pascal, Nicole, Bourdaloue, or philosophical moralists, like La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Molière, the greatest of them all, were very severe on man and anything but flattering to him. Christianity, which considers actual man only in the light of a fallen creature, does not fear to insist on the vices of nature, and on the necessity of a remedy and a supernatural restoration. Observers like La Rochefoucauld, having surprised man in a time of intriguing and in a corrupt society, had insisted in the same sense, with this difference, that they offered no remedy, so that, under this equally inexorable glance of both the Christian and the philosophic moralists, under this double and depressing agreement, all the natural virtues perished. Such a conclusion at first shocked Vauvenargues ; his great and simple soul felt a rising protest against this universal calumny of mankind : 'Man is now in disgrace with the philosophers, he says, and one makes him out more vicious than another ; but

perhaps he is on the point of raising himself and having his virtues restored to him'. And without any system, without any prejudice, but merely by consideration of the complete man, he first took in hand this work of rehabilitation.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau continued after him, and went a step further in his eulogy and in reclaiming the natural virtues for man; but what a difference in the method and the tone! In Vauvenargues there is no desire to aim at effect, no secret thought of reprisals against society, contrasted with the state of nature, no design of any kind. He remains within the lines of truth and accuracy.

He endeavours to show that that self-esteem, to which some philosophers attempted to reduce everything, does not exist in such a degree of refinement in all men, that it exists only in the form of a *general love of ourselves* which is inseparable from every living nature and which cannot be imputed as a vice: 'There are seeds of goodness and justice in the heart of man. If self-interest is predominant, I venture to say that that is not only according to nature, but also according to justice, provided that nobody suffers by this self-esteem, or that society loses less than it gains by it'.

Speaking of the feeling of *pity*, he defines it admirably:

'Pity is merely a mixed feeling of sadness and love: I do not think that it needs to be aroused by a reference to ourselves, as is believed. Why should not misery affect our heart in the same way that the sight of a sore does our sight? Are there not things which immediately affect the mind? . . . Is our soul incapable of a disinterested feeling?'

Restoring to honour the natural gifts and the primitive affections, and giving them their free play, he protests against the excess of reasoning and analysis which would reduce everything to an egotistic and grasping self-love: 'The body has its graces, the mind its talents: has the heart nothing but vices? and is man, though capable of reason, incapable of virtue?' He loves to speak, on every occasion, of the *well-born* man, of the *beauty of the natural*, which leads us to do good. Why should we see in this happy and artless inclination a narrow interest and a calculation? If there is a love of self that is naturally obliging and sympathetic, and another self-love without

humanity, without equity, without bounds, without reason, should they be confounded ?

Read the chapters of his third book on *moral good and evil* and on *greatness of soul* ; never was the narrowly interpreted morality of La Rochefoucauld, never was the morality of the eighteenth century, as sophisticated and grossly materialized by Helvétius, d'Argens, La Mettrie and many others among those who deserved better, more powerfully and more substantially refuted. He there lays down as a duty and a rule of conduct, respect for the fundamental conventions of society, for the laws (even if imperfect), subordination and sacrifice of one's private interest to the interest of all. He restores to the word *virtue* its magnificent and social meaning : ' The word virtue carries with it the idea of something estimable in respect of the whole earth. . . . The preference of the general above the personal interest is the only definition that is worthy of virtue, and that should fix the idea of it. On the other hand, *the mercenary sacrifice of the public happiness to one's own interest is the eternal seal of vice* '. In contradiction to Voltaire this time, in contradiction to the author of the *Mondain*, he denies that vice can, equally with virtue, operate directly for the public good. If the vices sometimes lead to good, it is because they are blended with virtues, with patience, temperance, courage ; it is because in certain cases they proceed along the same lines as virtue ; but if left to themselves and allowed their own way, they can only tend to the destruction of the world. In attacking the inconsistencies of those who aim at confounding these distinctions, which are *as clear as the day*, he hems them in on the evidence, he cuts short their pretensions, without refining as much as has been done since on the thorny and insoluble question of moral freedom :

' On what ground do they dare to make good and evil equal ? Is it because they suppose that our vices and virtues are the necessary effects of our temperament ? But are not diseases and health the necessary effects of the same cause ? and yet do we confound them, has anybody ever said that they were chimeras, that there was no such thing as health and disease ? Do they think that whatever is necessary is of no merit ? '

For a moment he enters with them, he follows them into their subtleties in order to silence them more effectually :

'But perhaps the virtues that I have described as a sacrifice of our own interest to the common interest, are but the pure effect of our love of ourselves. Perhaps we only do good because we find our pleasure in this sacrifice. A strange objection! Because I take a pleasure in the exercise of my virtue, is it the less profitable, the less precious to the whole universe, or less different from vice, which is the ruin of human kind? *Does the good in which I take a pleasure change its nature? does it cease to be good?*'

Such is the general inspiration of Vauvenargues, that by which he breaks with the moralists of the preceding century as well as those of his own time, and which forces from him these fine words, worthy of an ancient: 'We are susceptible to friendship, justice, humanity, compassion and reason. O my friends! what then is virtue?'

Vauvenargues has an antique soul, and, like the most enlightened of the ancients, he is not so ready to admit contradictions in nature. So, although no ancient writer influenced him more than Pascal, although he studied and sometimes imitated him in his style, although he magnificently celebrated him as the most astonishing genius and the most capable of confounding his adversaries, 'as the man on earth who was *best able to place truth in a good light* and to reason with power', he joins issue with him at the beginning on a capital point, and we may say that he tends to be Pascal's reformer rather than his disciple. Pascal indeed bases all his reasoning on the inner contradiction inherent in the nature of man, who, according to him, is but a monstrous assemblage of grandeur and baseness, of power and infirmity, and whom he tries to convict in his own eyes of being, but for faith, an inexplicable enigma. Now, Vauvenargues, whilst recognizing the imperfections and weaknesses of man, does not admit any of those fundamental contradictions and those difficulties which are from the outset an inextricable knot. He stops Pascal at the beginning, at his very first words, and there he must be stopped in effect, if he is not to be allowed time to tie his *knot* so to say, in which he will hold you and bind you tightly.

In a more modest form Vauvenargues brings to morality something of the vast and conciliatory genius that we admire in Leibniz, and that he had not time to develop

and extend in its best light. He has however the same conception of the universal order, and, even in his fragments of thoughts, he proves it by some great marks of evidence. He is not a blind optimist, and his predilection for Fénelon does not lead him into tameness or extreme indulgence. 'When we go deeply into man, we meet with some humiliating but incontestable truths', as he knows. He knows, he feels, from having experienced them, the miseries of man, and more than once there escape from his noble lips words steeped in bitterness. But those complaints which arise on all hands and which issue from his own heart, he reduces to their proper value. In his gloomiest moments he acknowledges 'that there are among men perhaps as many truths as errors, as many good as bad qualities, as many pleasures as pains: *but we accuse only our ills*'. His impartiality of view rises superior to partial, even personal sufferings, and accidents: 'If order prevails after all in the human race, it is a proof, he thinks, that reason and virtue are strongest'.

Vauvenargues' true biography, the history of his soul, lies entirely in his writings; it is a pleasure to extricate it and to say to ourselves with certainty, underlining such or such a passage with a penoil: Here it is indeed he that speaks, here he has intended to speak of himself. When he discusses greatness of soul, how strongly we feel that he is the model of it and possesses the noble reality! The mediocrity of his condition stifles him, and he needs all his virtue not to be soured. Vauvenargues' imagination was turned to history, to action, as I have said; a man of a noble and proud race, he lacked, in spite of his modesty, that more humble and ingenuous quality which has caused natural souls to profit by contact with the people, and to derive from that source their stronger and habitual inspirations. He has little, or rather he has no sense of the beauties of nature: in nature he is apt to consider only man and society; Vauvenargues had in him the craving to be a great man historically. Can you not see him in his little mansion of the Rue du Paon, sick, dying, never complaining before his friends, but sometimes betraying on paper the secret of that tranquil appearance: 'What matters it to an ambitious man who has irretrievably missed his fortune, whether he die more or

less poor ? ' He does not always resign himself so easily, he exclaims :

' O that we could, in our mediocre circumstances, refrain from being either vainglorious, or timid, or envious, or fawning, or preoccupied with the needs and cares of our condition, when the disdain and the manners of those around us combine to humble us ; oh that we could then rise, assert ourselves, resist the multitude . . . ! But who can maintain his spirit and his heart above his condition ? Who can escape the miseries which accompany mediocrity ' ?

And he gives us an inkling of some of these miseries :

' In a position of eminence, fortune at least dispenses us from the necessity of *bowing down to idols*. It frees us from the necessity of putting on disguises, of quitting our character, of *being absorbed in trifles*. . . . In short, just as one cannot enjoy a great fortune with a mean soul and a little genius, one cannot enjoy a great soul or a great genius in a mediocre fortune '.

In many a passage he returns, in a roundabout way, to the narrowness and constraint of a private existence for 'an individual who has a naturally great mind'. In these ill-stifled sorrows and regrets we recognize the man who, even whilst devoting himself to letters, could not help thinking that Cardinal de Richelieu was still superior to Milton.

M. Villemain has quoted, as a faithful and hardly veiled picture of himself, the portrait he drew of *Clazomène*. I find him not less vividly described and openly recognizable in that other portrait which is entitled : *The virtuous man depicted by his genius*. When writing it, Vauvenargues was certainly not thinking of drawing his own portrait ; but he was retracing and setting before himself his full ideal :

' When I find in a work a great imagination combined with great wisdom, a clear and profound judgment, very lofty but true passions, no effort to appear great, an extreme sincerity, much eloquence, and no art but that which proceeds from genius, then I respect the author ; I esteem him as highly as the sages or the heroes that he has described. *I love to think that the man who has conceived such great things was not incapable of performing them. The fortune which has reduced him to write about them appears to me unjust.* I am curious to gain information

about all the details of his life; if he has committed errors, I excuse them, because I know that it is difficult for nature *always to keep the heart of man above his condition*. I pity him on account of the cruel snares he meets with on his road, and even on account of the natural weaknesses that his courage has been unable to overcome. But when, in spite of fortune and in spite of his own faults, I learn that his mind has always been occupied with great thoughts, and *dominated by the most amiable passions*, I thank Nature on my knees for having created virtues independent of good fortune, and lights that adversity was powerless to extinguish¹.

These *amiable* passions that Vauvenargues speaks of, and which, in his view, dominate even the virtuous man, acquaint us with the part that should be played by the passions, in the opinion of this amiable and tender Stoic, ever turned to activity and careful to keep alive in man every spark of affection. We see him perpetually occupied in seeking and maintaining the relation between feeling and idea, scrupling to suppress any natural impulse, and too happy to favour any healthy or generous inspiration: 'If, he said to a young friend, you have any passion that elevates your feelings, that makes you more generous, more compassionate, more humane, cherish it'! He summed up his whole theory on this subject in these often quoted words which, though already spoken by others¹, will remain associated with his name, as one who was the worthiest to discover and utter them: 'Great thoughts come from the heart'.

As a literary critic, and in the judgments he brings to bear at the beginning upon the writers who formed the favourite subject of his readings, Vauvenargues is not without his inexperience: on Corneille, whose bombast repels him to the extent of hiding even his lofty beauties, on Molière, whose comic power does not appeal to him, Voltaire rightly corrects him, with a discretion of advice both delicate and flattering: Vauvenargues resumes his advantages when he speaks of La Fontaine, Pascal or Fénelon. In his first judgments we may say that Vauvenargues educates his literary sense with pen in hand, and that we assist at his education. But he is above everything and from the very beginning an excellent writer, who shares none of the faults of his day, and derives a

¹ Quintilian said in chapter vii. book x. of his *Institution of the Orator*: 'Pectus est quod disertos facit, et vis mentis'.

power of clear and luminous expression from the sincerity of his thought. Even Voltaire, clear and limpid as he is, has not in the same degree, in the terms he uses, that impress of accuracy and distinction of meaning. I am not thinking of the pieces in which Vauvenargues preludes, in which he has not yet thrown off all rhetoric and declamation ; but on his good pages he has set the stamp which marks them as his own. He has, properly speaking, that clearness which is the *ornament* of accuracy. He has, I repeat, *the excellence of distinction*, a power without any trace of effort. His images are rare and temperate ; the following charming sentences are often cited :

'The fires of the dawn are not so sweet as the first rays of glory'.

'The tempests of youth are surrounded by bright days'.

'The first days of spring have less charm than the nascent virtue of a young man'.

Pericles, speaking of the warriors who have died for their country, said : 'A city that has lost its young men, is like the year that has lost its spring'. Vauvenargues has similar touches of a young, clear and sober imagination, as we imagine them in Xenophon and Pericles.

He has the more right to claim them as his own, since he had hardly read the ancient authors, neither the Greeks nor the Latins, not knowing their language. What matter ! he belongs more surely to their family by instinct and nature, than the Abbé Barthélemy by wit and learning.

Those who are born eloquent, says Vauvenargues again, often speak so clearly and concisely of great things, that the majority of people cannot imagine that they speak of them with depth. Dull wits and sophists do not recognize philosophy when popularized by eloquence, and when it dares to paint the truth with bold and vigorous touches. They regard as superficial and frivolous *that splendour of expression which carries with it the proof of great thoughts . . .*

We should not venture to assert that he himself attained that *splendour* of expression, and that he made philosophy popular by his eloquence ; but he was in a fair way to do so, and we might have expected to find in him, if he had lived, a concise, elegant and brilliant Locke, with a loftiness of soul unknown to the other.

Vauvenargues' religion has been the theme of much discussion : it seems to me that if we look at it fairly and without any prejudice, we cannot make any mistake about it. There is no doubt that Vauvenargues was religious ; that stands out from his writings, and Marmontel said of him that he died ' with the constancy and the feelings of a *philosophic Christian* '. Voltaire, writing to him after a first reading of his book, after many a word of praise cannot help adding : ' There are things which have grieved my philosophy ; can we not worship the Supreme Being without turning Capuchins ? No matter ! all the rest enchants me ; you are the man I never hoped to see '. The things which afflicted Voltaire's philosophy are the *Meditation on Faith* and the *Prayer* which follows after it, two pieces which had no doubt been written some years before, and which Vauvenargues nevertheless thought right to include in his first edition. However, in the *Thoughts and Paradoxes* which came immediately after those two pieces, several points were noted which were not in harmony with strictly Christian doctrine ; even the manner in which Vauvenargues there speaks of death, which should not be, according to him, the final aim and prospect of human action, and which in itself appears to him the falsest of rules for judging a life, that fashion of regarding one of the *four ends* of man is too opposed to the orthodox point of view, and at the same time too essential in Vauvenargues to leave any room for doubt with regard to the real direction of his thoughts. Whatever may have been the opinions through which he had previously passed, at this date of 1746 and until his death, Vauvenargues' feelings were and remained religious, elevated, but philosophical and free. Only, respectful and prudent as he was, he avoided carrying controversy on to this ground, to which his friends, unable to drag himself, afterwards attempted to drag his memory. Voltaire and even M. Suard, in drawing him over to their side after his death, were unfaithful to his spirit. Surely the man who had used these words : ' The wisest and the bravest of all men, M. de Turenne, respected religion ; and an infinite number of obscure men rank themselves among men of genius and strong mind, merely because they despise it ' ! could not justly be invoked in support of the opinions of the philosophic propaganda !

Vauvenargues was most susceptible to friendship, and he brought to it the delicacy and tenderness which he seemed to have stolen from love. According to him we should follow our friends, not only into their misfortunes, but even into their weaknesses, and never abandon them. Could there be anything more delicate, more friendly, more practical and encouraging, than the counsels he gives to a young friend? Although young himself, he inspired veneration, and several of his companions in arms regarded him as they might have done a father. What he loved in youth was naturalness, chastity, already serious graces, a modesty joined to an honest self-confidence, and love of virtue. He held in horror and contempt the fatuity and frivolity so much in vogue at that time, that fashionable tone of lightness and persiflage, which Gresset caught so well in his *Le Méchant*, and which was the glory of the brilliant Stainvilles. He does not seem to have thought about women during the years in which he wrote, and the little he says about them reveals one who is disillusioned: 'Women cannot understand, he says, that there are men who are not interested in them'. It would seem as if, prematurely broken down in health, he had abandoned any fruitless regrets with regard to the sex: 'Those who are no longer able to find favour in the eyes of women and who know it, cure themselves of that weakness'.

Without being insensible and closing his eyes to the lights of his time, he was far from exaggerating their importance, and he devoted his mind to the moral improvement of the inner man, rather than to that general perfectibility which it is so convenient to believe in and to resign oneself to. 'Before attacking an abuse, he thought, we should see if we cannot destroy its foundations'. Of that the philosophers of the eighteenth century thought too little, and they never asked themselves, as he did, whether there are not 'some unavoidable abuses which are laws of Nature'. Vauvenargues said again, in open opposition to the illusions of his time: 'Until we discover the secret of giving more balance to the minds of men, all the progress we may make in the truth will not prevent them from reasoning falsely'; and thus it is, according to him, that 'great men, by teaching the weak to reflect, have put them on the path of error'. That he

wrote in the face of Voltaire and on the eve of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's appearance. In the order of knowledge and judgments, he thought that 'the effect of a great multiplicity of ideas, is to drag feeble minds into contradictions'. In the order of feelings and good taste, he did not think that we were at all ahead of the ancients, who were nearer to the instincts of nature than we are: 'Our judgment is educated, he said, our taste is not raised'. Such was the reasoned conviction of the man who worked most at his own inner moral improvement: nothing would have been more antipathetic to Vauvenargues than the perverted Condorcet.

That is not saying that Vauvenargues was in favour of retaining abuses or of the immobility of society: he desires everything that will renovate a nation, everything that will usefully cure the vice of decadence. A too long peace appears fatal to him: 'Peace, he says, makes nations happier and men weaker'. And he adds with excellent reason: 'War is not as burdensome as slavery'. He is not thinking so much of outer slavery as of that which is within us and of the poor-spiritedness which is invading the souls of men: 'Slavery, he says again, degrades men to the extent of making them love it'. It is this general degradation that he feels above everything, and he would avert it at any cost: 'Men must be permitted to do themselves great wrongs, in order to avoid a greater evil, slavery'. In these words there are the beginnings of revolution. For the rest, to form an idea of the line of boldness and at the same time of moderation that Vauvenargues would have liked and followed in different circumstances and in the public crises that occurred since, I think that we have but to consider him in another self, and to recognize him in André Chénier.

If Vauvenargues had but lived a few years longer, he would have found himself in a delicate and singular position. When he died, the eighteenth century was on the eve of entering upon the second so stormy and so contested half of its career. In face of the *Encyclopædia*, of Helvetius' book, of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's first paradoxes, and of that universal philosophical crusade, what would Vauvenargues have said, what would he have done? That question gives food for much reflection. He would

no doubt have followed the middle line of the Turgots and the Malesherbes ; but we may believe that, generous and brave as he was, he would have tilted at the errors even of his friends, and that he would have protested more strongly than by his silence. It was better for him perhaps that he was withdrawn before a longer ordeal. A writer of such purity, of such loftiness and simplicity, persisting under such different skies and in an ever more unpropitious climate, would have been too great a contrast and a too great intraction of the laws of an epoch. Nature wished to offer him to his century as a last exemplar of the preceding age ; then she called him away with a jealous discretion.

In all that we read and know of him, Vauvenargues appears a strongly tempered mind, a soul of great elevation and a great heart. He is a rare example of a superior man long held down below his level, repressed, loaded with misfortunes, neither soured nor in revolt, but nobly taking his revenge and strongly and serenely opening out to himself a career in the order of the intellect. He, who suffered so much and succeeded so little, believes that the surest means of making one's fortune is to merit it ; that real merit alone can make directly for fame. Without false enthusiasm, without resentment, he judged humanity with a just measure. When judging humanity, one is, involuntarily and if not on one's guard, influenced by the secret thought of the rank one holds ; one is inclined to raise or lower it according to the more or less virtue, the more or less strength and power of flight one feels within. Vauvenargues had an interest in placing the average of humanity as high as possible, certain as he was of reaching it. And yet he did not place it too high. He recognized the vices and failings of men, but he admitted them with pain, without that malicious joy which is like a satisfaction and a secret self-absolution, just as he also maintained the great lines, the sound and strong parts of nature, without that air of boasting which resembles self-exaltation and self-applause. Placed between the rather peevish moralists of the seventeenth century and the audaciously confident philosophers of the eighteenth century, he did not overrate the nature of man, nor did he blacken it. He was a Pascal, more temperate though no weaker,

who really kept himself on the human level, and did not dig himself a hell ¹.

¹ Since the above article was written, much has happened to Vauvenargues. The French Academy having offered a prize for his Eulogy, M. Gilbert was chosen from among several competitors worthy of esteem. Animated by his success, he then began an eager search for any unpublished writings of his author. He found some very interesting Correspondence and published it in a very carefully-prepared edition (2 vols., Furne, 1857). I have written about it at some length in three articles published in the *Moniteur* of August 24 and 31, and September 7, 1857; the articles will be found in the last volumes of these *Causeries*. However, this first article, which I wrote before the last discoveries, is not too full of errors, and the glimpses I have given of the character and the vocation of our author have been rather confirmed than contradicted.

FREDERICK THE GREAT ¹

Monday, December 2, 1850.

THE *Works of Frederick* have not hitherto been as highly esteemed in France as they deserve to be. We have made merry over a few wretched lines of that metromaniac prince, which are after all no worse than a great deal of the poetry of the time, which was thought charming and which we find it impossible to read to-day; and not sufficient attention has been given to the serious works of the great man, who would not be like other great men if he had not in good truth set his stamp upon the many pages of politics and history that he wrote, and which form a vast whole. As for Frederick's letters, we have done them more justice; when we read in Voltaire's Correspondence the letters which the King wrote to him, intermingled with those that he received in reply, we find that not only do they bear the vicinity very well, but that, whilst they are equal in wit they excel in that they show a wider vision and more good sense, proceeding from strength of mind and character. To-day we must try for once to put aside our petty ideas concerning a much too literary rhetorical art, to discover the man and the king in the writer, and greet in him one of the best historians that we possess.

I say *we*, for Frederick wrote in French, he thought in French, he often had the French in his mind and expected to be read by them, even when he wrote down views and narratives of events which were so little likely to be pleasant to them. As a prose writer Frederick is a disciple of our good authors, and in history he is a pupil, and truly an original and unique pupil, and in places a past master, of the historian of the *Age of Louis XIV.*

The carelessness and inaccuracy with which the Works

¹ *Work of Frederick the Great* (Berlin, 1846-1870). *

of Frederick had been printed hitherto had something to do with the little esteem paid him by those who are not accustomed to form their own judgments on every matter. It is difficult to imagine how far the inaccuracy and the licence of the editors was carried. I will quote only one example, which until now had remained a private matter. It was proposed in France in 1759, during the Seven Years' War, to print the works of the *Philosopher of Sans-Souci* (that was the title Frederick had adopted in his poems and his first literary essays). Now, M. de Choiseul, the minister, wrote at that time to M. de Malesherbes, the Director of the Publishing Trade, on the subject of this plan and the request made by some booksellers of Paris to print the Collection of the Works of Frederick which they had procured : ¹

'At Marly, December 10.

'It is of importance, Sir, that the King's Minister should not be compromised or suspected of having tolerated the edition of the works of the King of Prussia. So, in case M. Darget (*the King of Prussia's reader and secretary*) should come to speak to me about it, I shall stoutly affirm that I have no knowledge of that edition, and that I shall take the orders of the King to prevent its being published in France. Meanwhile, until I see M. Darget, I hope that the edition will be out and that all will be said. . . .'

So the publication, protected and clandestine at the same time, took place; but it is curious to see how M. de Choiseul set to work to falsify it, going so far even as to draw up with his own hand the details of the corrections and modifications to be introduced :

'We can only tolerate it (this Collection), he wrote again to M. de Malesherbes, after taking the greatest precautions to make it appear to have been printed outside of France, and we must not lose sight of this consideration, whilst insisting upon corrections being made.

'With this consideration, I have proposed only two kinds of corrections : those that may be made in such a way that they will not be perceived by readers of the text. As these changes concern only certain expressions of impiety of the first order or hits at the great powers, we need not fear that the King of Prussia will complain of his text having been altered, and the public will not be able to guess it. . . . But, while making

¹ This Collection had been printed in Prussia in 1750 and 1752; but these two first editions were quite confidential, very few copies having been printed of them, and solely for the use of the King's friends.

these cuttings, I have carefully avoided putting anything in their place. That would be a blameworthy infidelity.

'The other corrections are suppressions of proper names, which will be replaced by points or asterisks. That is not, any more than the other, what may be called an infidelity. It is perhaps even a piece of consideration for the King of Prussia. . . .'

We see how the minister who drove the Jesuits out of France was capable, when he thought it necessary, to practise equivocation, and secretly to alter a text whilst affirming that it was not a breach of faith. Later, when the posthumous writings of the King of Prussia were published, accuracy was, for a thousand reasons, no better observed, and we may say, in considering the edition that is now appearing at Berlin by order of the Prussian Government, and comparing it with the preceding editions, that the works of Frederick the Great are to-day appearing for the first time in an authentic and worthily recognizable text.

The edition undertaken by the Prussian Government, which will consist of not less than thirty quarto volumes, is a monumental one. In the same way France should some day, and that soon, publish the works of Napoleon, works now scattered about, gathered without method or order, not exactly falsified, but printed in general almost as carelessly as those of Frederick had been hitherto. The monument of Napoleon's tomb will not be complete until it is supplemented with the national edition of his works. Be that as it may, the Prussian Government and the reigning King have regarded it as a matter of honour to publish a complete collection of the writings of the man who was both the greatest king and the first historian of his country. Some able scholars have been charged with the carrying out of this project; Herr Preuss, the historiographer of Brandenburg, has the direction of it. The historical portion of Frederick's works has been rightly given the precedence of the other writings; it fills seven volumes, five of which I have before me. I have taken cognisance of them, and examined them with all the care I am capable of.

And in order not to be obliged to return to these details of the edition, I may be allowed in the first place to make two or three remarks. The text, typographically speak-

ing, is admirable: the titles display great taste; the portraits are handsome: the only point I object to is the kinds of vignettes which terminate the pages at the end of each chapter, and which sometimes make this royal volume resemble a book of illustrations: these embellishments, often puzzling as to their subjects, are not in keeping with the monumental seriousness of the edition. As to the text, I have said that it is exact and faithful for the first time; many firm touches, many strong and energetic phrases have been restored which the caution or the literary prudery of the first editors had struck out or toned down. Still I should have wished that scrupulousness had not been carried to the point of carefully restoring the grammatical faults. What was the good of making the King say, for example, that M. de Lowendal *was* marched to some point, instead of *had* marched? Frederick, before publishing his book, would have had these trifles corrected by one of his French academicians in Berlin. Another defect of this edition, and a serious defect, is that it wants strategical maps and plans of the places, which makes the reading of these campaigns irksome and unprofitable for most readers. Why not join to these histories of Frederick an atlas specially drawn up, like the one which M. Thiers is having executed for his History of Napoleon? Lastly, if I may be allowed to enter into these particulars, which are nevertheless important for the reader, I must complain, in the name of France, that there is not a single complete copy in Paris of the volumes hitherto published. The National Library possesses only five volumes; the Library of the Institute only one. The King of Prussia, who is distributing this magnificent edition, has forgotten our Institute of France in his largess. The great Frederick would have begun with it¹.

I have said everything on these external details, as I may call them, and I come to the great man whom we are fortunate in being at last able to study at close quarters and with certainty in his successive acts and writings. Frederick, in spite of the injury he has done himself by certain of his rhapsodies and speeches, by the paraded

¹ Besides the large quarto edition, a smaller one is in course of publication, for the use of the general reader; this little edition, which is on sale, is more easily procurable.

cynicism of his jeers and impieties, and by that mania for verse-writing which always makes us smile, is a truly great man, one of those rare men of genius who are born to be manifestly the heads and leaders of nations. When we have stripped his personality of all those anecdotic absurdities which are the delight of frivolous minds, and when we go straight to the man and the character, we stand still with admiration and respect ; we recognize at the first moment, and at every step that we take with him, a superior and a master, robust, sensible, practical, active and unwearying, inventive in proportion to the needs, penetrating, never duped, deceiving others as little as possible, constant under every fortune, subordinating his private affections and his passions to his patriotic feelings and his zeal for the greatness and utility of his nation ; in love with glory whilst appreciating it at its right value ; vigilantly mindful and desirous of the improvement, the honour and well-being of the populations entrusted to his keeping, even though he has little esteem for men in general. As a military leader, it is not for me to judge him ; but, if I have rightly understood the observations which Napoleon has made on Frederick's campaigns, and Frederick's own simple accounts, it seems to me that he was not first and foremost a warrior. From this point of view he is not at first sight very brilliant or very captivating. Often beaten, often at fault, his greatness consists in his having learned by force of schooling, above all in his having retrieved his mistakes or those of fortune by his cool-headedness, his tenacity and an imperturbable equanimity. However warmly good judges may praise his Battle of Leuthen and certain of his great manœuvres and operations, they find still more to criticize on many and many an occasion. ' He was great above all in the most critical moments, Napoleon said ; that is the finest praise that can be given to his character '. It is this moral character that stands out above the soldier-like abilities in Frederick, and remains much superior to them ; his was a strongly tempered soul and a great mind that applied itself to war because it was obliged to do so, rather than that of a born warrior. He had neither the impetuous and overwhelming valour of a Gustavus-Adolphus or a Condé, nor that talent for transcendental geometry which characterizes Napoleon,

and which that mighty genius applied to war with the same ease and the same breadth with which Monge applied it to other subjects. Gifted with a superior mind, with a character and a will in consonance with this mind, Frederick devoted himself to military science as he did to many other things, and before long he excelled in it, he mastered and improved the instruments and methods of it in his hands, although it was not perhaps at first quite his element, or the calling of a genius adapted to it.

Nature had made him before everything to be a ruler, to be a king with all the faculties which that lofty office requires; and the science of war being one of its most indispensable faculties, he devoted himself to it and mastered it. 'One must adopt the spirit of one's trade', he wrote laughingly to Voltaire in the middle of the Seven Years' War. That looks like a mere jest, and that is true. In Frederick, the will and the character directed the mind in everything.

As a rule, none of Frederick's qualities show that primary freshness which is the brilliant sign of the singular gifts of nature and God. Everything, in him, appears to be the conquest of the will and of reflection acting upon a universal capacity, which they determine here or there, according to varying necessities. He is indeed the great king of his time; he has the stamp of the century of analysis.

Some have tried to establish a contradiction between the words and writings of Frederick, the adept in philosophy, and his actions as king and conqueror. I do not find this contradiction as great as they have tried to make out. I leave out of account a few essays and a few sallies of Frederick as a young man and Prince Royal; but, from the moment that he understood his rôle of king, I find the whole man in harmony with himself, and I find him true. I cannot see, for example, in the histories he wrote, a word that he did not verify in his conduct and life: *

'A prince, he said and thought, is the first servant and the first magistrate of the State; he owes the State an account of the use he makes of taxes; he levies them in order to be able to defend the State by means of the troops he maintains; in order to sustain the dignity with which he is invested, to reward services and merit, to establish a sort of balance between the

wealthy and those involved in debt, to relieve the unfortunate of every kind and class; in order to put magnificence into everything that interests the body of the State in general. If the Sovereign has an enlightened mind and an upright heart, he will order all his expenses according to the public utility and the greatest advantage of his people'.

That is what Frederick really did, in peace, in war, almost at all times, and he failed in this respect as little as it is possible to do. When we have made allowance for his faults, his ambitions and his personal mistakes, the sum and the substance of his policy remains still what we have just seen and what he has so well traced out. To judge him as a politician, we must get away from the French point of view, from French illusions, and from the atmosphere of Choiseul's ministry by which we are surrounded. Open, once more, Frederick's *Memoirs*; in writing them he does not seek to colour the truth. I know of no man who, with pen in hand, is less of a chaflatan than he; he tells us his reasons and does not colour them in any way: 'A borrowed part is difficult to sustain, he thought; one is never anything well except oneself'. When writing the history of his house under the title *Memoirs of Brandenburg*, he gives us the import, the primary inspiration and the key of his actions. Prussia had not really come to count for anything in the world, and to put its *grain*, as he says, into the political scales of Europe, until the time of the Great Elector, the contemporary of the best days of Louis XIV. In narrating the history of that brave and able sovereign, who 'to the mediocre fortune of an Elector succeeded in uniting the heart and the merits of a great king', in telling us of that prince 'the honour and glory of his house, the defender and restorer of his country', greater than his frame, from whom his posterity date their origin, we feel that Frederick has found his ideal and his model: what the Great Elector was as a mere prince and member of the Empire, Frederick will be as a king. This title, this qualification of King, which was given to the son of the Great Elector as a sort of favour, seemed to have lowered rather than raised the Prussian name. The first Frederick who bore it, a slave to ceremonial and etiquette, had made this title of Majesty almost ridiculous in his own person; it had crushed him. This first King of Prussia, by his

whole life of empty pomp and show, said, unconsciously, to his posterity: 'I have acquired the title, and I am proud of it; it is for you to make yourselves worthy of it'. Frederick's father, of whom the son, so ill-treated by him, spoke so admirably, with a feeling not perhaps filial but truly royal and magnanimous, that father, coarse, economical, miserly, a cruel tyrant to his own family and a worshipper of discipline, yet a deserving man, who 'had a laborious soul in a robust body', had restored to the Prussian State the solidity which the vanity and pomposity of the first king had forfeited. But that was not enough: Frederick's father, an estimable man in many respects when seen near by, was not respected from afar; his very moderation and the simplicity of his manners had been prejudicial to him. His eighty thousand troops were regarded as a good show off on the parade ground, as a grand drill-sergeant's mania. Prussia did not count among the Powers, and when Frederick, at the age of twenty-eight (1740), ascended that throne which he was to occupy for forty-six years, everything remained to be done for the honour of the nation and his own; he had to create Prussian honour, he had to win his spurs as a king. His first thought was 'that a prince should compel respect for his person, especially for his nation; that moderation is a virtue which statesmen should not always practise rigorously, because of the corruption of the age, and that, upon a change of reign, it is more expedient to show marks of firmness than of mildness'. He thought again, and tells us frankly, 'that Frederick I (his grandfather), by raising Prussia to a kingdom, had, by this vain grandeur, sown a seed of ambition in his posterity, which was destined to bear fruit sooner or later. The monarchy he bequeathed to his descendants was, if I may so express myself (it is still Frederick who is speaking), a kind of *hermaphrodite*, which partook more of the electorate than of the kingdom. There was some glory to be won in *deciding which it should be*; and this feeling was assuredly one of those which strengthened the King in the great enterprises to which he was pledged by so many motives'. He tells us these motives, and why he forestalled the House of Austria instead of waiting to be struck or humbled. He will tell us with the same clearness and the same openness

what were the motives which made him get the start of his enemies at the opening of the Seven Years' War, and determined him to appear the aggressor, though he was not so in fact. These motives, all derived from the interests of his cause and of his nation, are not at variance, as far as we can see, with the maxims and favourite ideas of Frederick, considered as a philosopher and writer. Knowing as he did his fellow-man and the ways of the world, he understood very well that to be a bit of a philosopher on the throne is only permissible in a man who has shown that he can be something more besides. He was not of a humour to play the easy-going part of a Stanislas. To be more surely the shepherd of his people, he began by showing the others that he was a lion. All that he willed, he did ; he resolutely asserted the position and function of Prussia, created a counterpoise to the House of Austria, established in North Germany a hearth of civilization, a centre of culture and tolerance. It is for his successors to maintain it and to remain faithful, if they can, to his spirit.

All who have spoken in praise of Frederick have always made a reservation in respect of Poland and the partition of 1773, which he instigated and profited by. Here I will ask permission to keep silence, the Polish question not being one of those which can be conveniently treated, and with entire impartiality. In this name of Poland and the misfortunes attaching to it there is a remnant of magic which enflames. Frederick, by the way, never deviated from his opinion with regard to the character of the Poles as a nation : this opinion is forcibly expressed in ten passages of his histories, and long before the idea of the partition was born.

In this circumstance however, and real as the motives may have been which he himself has expounded in all their nudity, he violated what the ancients called *the conscience of the human race*, and he co-operated in one of those scandals which always shake the confidence of nations in the protecting right of societies. He forgot his own maxim : 'The reputation of a knave is as disgraceful to the prince himself, as it is disadvantageous to his interests'. But in this case the considerable interest of the moment and of the future, the instinct of natural growth, carried the day. And in that again he was not

as inconsistent as one might think. His delicacy as a philosopher was not of a nature that it could not accommodate itself to these methods of the politician. With his feelings of relative justice and even of humanity, Frederick absolutely lacked an ideal, like his whole century : he did not believe in anything that was better than himself. With energy he led and cared for the people entrusted to his keeping ; he set his honour and dignity upon the performance of his duty : but he gave it no higher foundation. There we touch upon the radical vice of Frederick's wisdom, I mean, irreverence, *irreligion*. We know the cynical mockeries of his conversations and letters : he had the supreme irregularity, for a king, of jesting and jeering at everything, even at God. The love of glory was the only thing on which he never jested¹. An odd inconsistency and protestation of a noble nature ! for if mankind is so foolish and contemptible, and if there is nothing and nobody above it, why go and devote one's body and soul to the idea of glory, which is no more than the desire and expectation of the highest esteem among men. It is inconceivable that, regarding everything as he did from the higher point of view of the State and the social interest, Frederick should have looked upon religion as one of those neutral grounds where one can agree to meet for one's after-dinner pastimes and pleasures. He forgot that he himself, writing to Voltaire, had said to him : ' Every man has a wild beast within himself ; few know how to keep it in chains, most of us give it a loose rein when not held back by the terrors of the law '. His nephew, William of Brunswick, one day took the liberty of pointing out to him his inconsistency in thus loosening the religious fetters which hold in the wild beast. ' Oh ! against criminals, replied Frederick, I have the hangman, and that is enough '. No, that is not enough ; when you have only the hangman, it is not enough. Therein especially lies the danger and the weak point of Frederick's establishment : he might be a great organizer,

¹ One of the most competent judges, one of the collaborators of Herr Preuss in the edition of Frederick's Works, M. Charles de La Harpe, writes to me on the subject of that sentence : ' There are *two other* things on which he never jested : *love of country and friendship*. This mocking hero is the tenderest and most faithful friend, and it is known that his passion for his country was such, that he deprived himself of everything in order to have the means of relieving the miseries of his subjects or to endow Prussia with useful institutions '.

he was not a legislator. But, even setting aside the Sovereign's own interest, it is repugnant to see a great man defiling himself with jests of that kind about things that are an object of veneration in the eyes of the greater number; up to a certain point it meant violating that hospitable tolerance in which he gloried, openly to despise what he pretended to welcome and to tolerate. It suggests a remnant of native bad taste and northern coarseness¹, and somebody was justified in using these severe words of Frederick's letters: 'There are some great and powerful thoughts, but side by side with them we see on these pages of Marcus-Aurelius the stains of beer and tobacco'. Frederick, who respected heroes at least, said: 'Since the pious Æneas, since the crusades of Saint Louis, we see no examples in history of a pious hero'. Pious, that is possible, taking the word (*dévots*) in the narrow sense; but religious we may say that heroes have almost always been; and Johann Muller, the illustrious historian, who had such a fine appreciation of Frederick's merits and great qualities, was right in summing him up in these words: 'Frederick only lacked the highest degree of culture, religion, which perfects humanity and humanizes every greatness'.

To-day I wish to speak only of Frederick the historian. His histories consist of his *Memoirs of Brandenburg*, which contain all that it is important to know of the annals of Prussia anterior to his accession, and of four other works which contain the history of his time and his reign from 1740 to 1778. One of these four works is the *History of the Seven Years' War*, which ranks him naturally between Napoleon and Caesar.

¹ M. Henry, Pastor of the French Church at Berlin, has written a Dissertation in which he treats of Frederick's irreligion; without pretending to absolve him on that point, the worthy writer thinks that this French side, from which he regarded and flattered the philosophers of the eighteenth century, has been much exaggerated; he tries to prove that Frederick, with a sort of fanfaronade, took a delight in exaggerating it himself. M. Henry is of opinion that that irreligious mockery of Frederick played especially upon the surface of his soul; that in giving way to it, he yielded above all to a bad social tone, thinking that it would never come to the knowledge of the public; but that the foundation of his royal nature was serious, thoughtful, and worthy of a legislator who embraces and desires the fundamental things of every society and every nation. In a complete and impartial appreciation of Frederick one should take account of the facts to which M. Henry calls attention, and from the point of view to which he refers them.

* The *Memoirs of Brandenburg* are the only part which appeared in his lifetime. All through the work, even in the introduction, it is clear that we have to do with a strong and elevated mind, which has the noblest and soundest ideas on the branch of learning he is treating of. 'A man who does not believe that he has fallen straight down from heaven, he says, who does not think that the world began at the day of his own birth, should be curious to learn what has taken place in all ages and in all countries'. Every man should at least care for what happened before him in the country he inhabits. To make this knowledge really profitable one condition is indispensable—truth. Frederick desires the truth in history: 'A work written without freedom can be but mediocre or bad'. He will tell the truth then about persons, about others' ancestors as well as his own. But he thinks it his duty to chronicle only those things that are memorable and useful. His aim is not to collect curiosities of any kind. He will leave it to the professors with names ending in *us*, and enamoured of erudite minutiae, to find out what stuff the coat of Albert surnamed *the Achilles* was made of. He is firmly of the opinion 'that a thing deserves to be written down only in so far as it deserves to be remembered'. He hastens rapidly over the barbarous and sterile ages, and those of his ancestors who are known only by name and a few insignificant features: 'It is with histories, he says, as with rivers, which become important only at the point where they become navigable'. He chooses French in preference to any other language, because 'it is, he says, the most polished and the most widespread language in Europe, and because it appears to be in some sort fixed by the good authors of the age of Louis XIV'. He might have added: because it is the language best adapted for rendering the thoughts of a clear, vigorous, sensible and resolute genius.

All the little biographies of the primitive Electors, of whom there is not very much to be said, are sketched with sobriety and with a severe taste. A few sarcasms thrown out in passing, a few philosophical digressions point to the disciple of Voltaire; but these pleasantries are fleeting and do not here detract from the general tone. This tone is manly and simple, and the narration is supported by rare but powerful reflections, which reveal the connexions

of causes and effects. When he comes to the epoch* of the Reformation, of the Thirty Years' War, the historian-king describes those great events in a few words by their general features and in their real principles; always and everywhere he distinguishes the essential from the accessories. When he comes upon the horrors and the devastations which signalized those sad periods of history, he gives expression to sentiments of humanity and order, to sentiments of good administration in which there is nothing affected and which he afterwards justified. I have said that the model that he sets before himself, the man from whom he rightly dates the origin of his house's greatness, is Frederick William, called the *Great Elector*, the man who took Brandenburg in hand at the issue of that disastrous Thirty Years' War 'which had turned the Electorate into a frightful wilderness, where the villages were only to be located by the heaps of ashes which prevented the grass from growing'. He dwells with complacency on that reign; he even dares to establish a parallel between that petty prince of the North and Louis XIV in his glory: saving two or three rather florid and too mythological touches, saving a slightly oratorical tone which shows through here and there, this comparison furnishes a fine and truly elevated page of history. It is to be remarked that Frederick, with his pen in his hand, though he remains serious, is less sober than Caesar and even Napoleon; he does not eschew talent properly speaking, especially in that first history of which Gibbon was able to say that it was *well written*. Having to narrate the campaign of 1670, when the Great Elector, in the middle of winter, drove out the Swedes who had invaded Prussia, he said: 'The retreat of the Swedes resembled a rout; out of sixteen thousand that had entered hardly three thousand returned to Livonia. They entered Prussia like Romans, they left it like Tartars'.

He finds those expressions which sum up a whole judgment on men and nations. In his portrait of his grandfather, the first Frederick, son of the Great Elector, and so unlike his father, he will say, to mark the ostentation of that new-fledged king, who had no fewer than a hundred chamberlains: 'His embassies were as magnificent as those of the Portuguese'.

His judgment of men is profound and decisive. He is

visibly attracted by heroes ; he speaks only with respect and with an instinct of high fraternity of Gustavus Adolphus, of Marlborough, of Eugène ; but he does not mistake greatness, and is not lavish with the word : Queen Christina, with her abdication from caprice, appears to him no more than *bizarre* ; the duel between Charles XII and Peter the Great at Pultawa is in his eyes that of the *two most singular men of their age*. Foreigner though he is, he can choose his expressions like a man of just mind who measures or bends the language to his thought. Of that same Peter the Great he said very forcibly in another place : ' Peter I, to civilize his nation, worked upon it like aqua-fortis on iron '.

In painting statesmen and ministers he finds similar words indicating great experience and authority, those words which anticipate history and which engrave themselves on the memory. Wishing to characterize the too vast, the too restless genius of Cardinal Alberoni, and his too fiery imagination, he says : ' If they had given Cardinal Alberoni two worlds like ours to overthrow, he would have asked for yet a third '. The portraits of the persons he knew and managed are caught with the hand of a master, by a man who was clever or even inclined to seize hold of vices and absurdities. To give an idea of General von Seckendorf, who served the Emperor and Saxony at the same time, he says : ' His interests were sordid ; his manners were coarse and boorish ; lying was so habitual to him, that he had lost the use of truth¹. His was the mind of a usurer passing now into the body of a soldier, now into that of a negotiator '. And observe that all this is not a professed portrait like those we read in the more or less literary histories, where the historian takes his stand before his model : it is said cursorily, as by a man of the profession thinking aloud and talking.

When he comes to the affairs of his own time, those which he directed and in which he took part, Frederick maintains the same tone, or rather he adopts a more simple one than in his History of Brandenburg. When speaking of himself, he is neither proud nor humble : he is truthful. When speaking of others, even of his

¹ This touch recalls Xenophon's portrait, in his *Retreat of the Ten Thousand*, of Menon, who was so advanced in the art of lying that he regarded truthful people as badly brought up and without education.

greatest enemies, he is just. At the opening of his reign, when relating that conquest of Silesia which aroused so much anger, the success of which was so sudden and desirable, he openly expounds his motives ; he points out his faults and his *schools* of warfare. Side by side with the measures and calculations prompted by a prudent boldness, he acknowledges his debt to ' opportunity, that mother of great events ', and he is careful on every occasion to give fortune her due :

' What contributed most to this conquest, he says, was an army which had been formed during twenty-two years by an admirable discipline, and was superior to the other armies of Europe (*observe the tribute to his father*), generals who were true citizens, wise and incorruptible ministers, *and lastly a certain good luck which often accompanies youth and is denied to advanced age*. If this great enterprise had failed, the King would have passed for a heedless prince, who had undertaken something beyond his strength : success caused him to be regarded as clever as well as fortunate. In truth, it is only fortune that decides a reputation : he whom she favours is applauded ; he whom she disdains is blamed '.

The *History of the Seven Years' War* is admirable in its simplicity and truthfulness. The author does not confine himself to the strategic operations as a whole, he embraces the picture of the Courts of Europe during this lapse of time. In his narrative of the events of the war, he is sober and rapid, not entering into particular details, except in a small number of cases where he cannot help paying his tribute of gratitude to his brave troops or to some valiant comrade in arms. I recommend the reading of the sixth chapter, which treats of the campaign of 1757, so rich in vicissitudes and returns of fortune, in which Frederick, driven at bay, won his easy and brilliant victory of Rosbach, his skilful and *classical* victory of Leuthen. If we join to this dignified and unadorned narrative the letters he wrote to Voltaire during the same time, we shall witness Frederick's finest moment, the crisis from which he issued with the most heroic and glorious perseverance. There we may truly recognize the philosopher and the Stoic in the soldier. The most serious reproach he at all times casts at the Court of Austria, is ' that it follows the brute impressions of nature : puffed up in times of good fortune and cringing in adversity, it has never suc-

ceeded in attaining that wise moderation which makes men impassive to the blessings and ills that chance dispenses'. For himself, he is resolved, in the greatest extremities, never to give in to chance or to *brute nature*, and to persevere so much on the path trodden by great men, as to make Fortune in the end blush with shame.

At the issue of that war which caused so much blood to flow, and after which everything in Germany was restored to the same condition as before, saving the devastation and ruin, Frederick takes a pleasure in reminding us of the weakness and vanity of human plans : ' Does it not appear astonishing, he says, that what is most subtle in human prudence joined to strength should be so often the dupe of unexpected events or the strokes of fortune ? and does it not seem as if there were a certain *I know not what* that trifles contemptuously with the projects of man ? ' There we recognize a reminiscence of Lucretius in some of his finest lines : *Usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quædam*. . . . Napoleon, on undertaking the campaign of 1812, wrote to the Emperor Alexander : ' I have realized that the die is cast, and that this invisible Providence, whose rights and sway I acknowledge, has decided this affair as it has so many others '. It is the same thought ; but in Napoleon's expression there is an extra gleam, a mysterious reflection as it were brought back from Mount Tabor, that we do not find in Frederick's thought. This consummate king failed to ascend one step further up the height to receive on his brow the ray that gilds and that which dazzles.

Frederick, by the way, descends into the truth of the human heart, into the reality of moral observation and practical prophecy, when he adds :

' Time, which cures and effaces all ills, will shortly no doubt restore to the Prussian States their abundance, their prosperity and their first splendour ; the other powers will be similarly restored ; then other men of ambition will incite to fresh wars and cause fresh disasters ; for that is the peculiar nature of the human mind, that examples correct nobody ; the follies of the fathers are lost to their children ; every generation must commit its own '.

Perhaps some day I shall speak of Frederick the *dilettante*, the amateur of wit and letters. I even possess on that subject some unpublished details which, if need be, would serve me as an excuse.

M. DROZ

Monday, December 9, 1850.

ON the 12th of last month we assisted at the touching funeral of a man who was universally esteemed, who personified in himself the complete idea that one can form of the good man and also of the man of Letters of the past. This double character of M. Droz was indicated and engraved as it were on his tombstone in a very fine discourse of M. Guizot and in the sincere words of M. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire. Other marks of tribute still await his memory within the Academies of which he was a member. Without wishing to encroach upon what will be said elsewhere by more authoritative voices and with greater expansion, I should like to pay here, in my own way, my tribute of esteem to a man whom I knew and particularly respected; I would like to render more clear and familiar to all the idea that we should associate with his name.

Joseph Droz, born at Besançon on October 31, 1773, of a family of magistrates and juriconsults honourably known in the province, had received from his fathers, as if by inheritance, his uprightness of mind, his kindness of heart and his disposition to do good. He was born and he remained all his life one of the race of the good and the just. An only son, he lost his mother in early youth: his father took her place, watched over his childhood and followed his studies with an intelligent solicitude. The young Droz distinguished himself at the College of Besançon; he had, as he tells us, some literary ambition and, like every *rhetorician* of promise, he had his tragedy, written on the sly at the end of his Rhetoric year. The Philosophy course bored him; it was still carried on in Latin and in the form of syllogisms: he asked to be exempted from it, and his father allowed him to finish

his studies in freedom under his own supervision. One of the first books he gave him to read to console him for the tedium of the syllogisms was Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*.

The young Droz was educated, as we see, in the reign of Louis XVI, and he was sixteen years of age when the Revolution of '89 broke out. His mind as well as his heart ever bore the impress of those two moments. Of that education begun during the fair years of Louis XVI he retained his power of social optimism and of universal good-will, a cheerful view of humanity, a tincture of philanthropy of which he had the principle and the fire within him, but whose colour showed the influence of the date of his boyhood and early youth. Of the great era of '89 he always retained, after purifying it more and more in the flame of the inner sanctuary, his active passion for doing good, his ardour for the happiness, the emancipation and the improvement of his fellow men: in that sense he was and remained one of the children of that great generation, and that breath which, blowing through the souls of men, met with so much complexity and engendered the tempests, never ceased to animate him gently, evenly, with elevation and perseverance, until, in his last years, it was not to be distinguished in him from the zeal of the Christian.

Sent to Paris by his father to go through his administrative studies, he arrived there on August 11, 1792, on the very day after the fall of the throne. After the first September days, one of his fellow townsmen, saved from the massacre of the Abbey by one of the slaughterers, felt obliged to invite that saviour in spite of himself to dinner; and Droz, whom his friend had called to his aid to do the honours of the repast, dined between two *Septembriseurs*, one of whom had not even quitted his sabre. Meanwhile the war broke out, and all the young men hastened to the frontiers. Droz, having returned to Besançon, enlisted as a volunteer in Doubs' battalion, and, at the start, he was elected Captain by his comrades. Then attached to the Staff as adjunct to the Adjutants-General, he served three years in the Army of the Rhine, under Schérer and Desaix. In the thick of the Reign of Terror, Schérer sent him on a mission to Paris. Droz was received by Carnot, who, wishing to be agreeable to

him, gave him permission to spend a fortnight at Paris. Droz took advantage of that permission to see everything, but, before the first day was over, he had seen more than enough. He assisted at the sittings of the Revolutionary Tribunal and at all that followed. In spite of his sensibility, he forced himself to undergo that torture, that moral ordeal. He often told with power of the impression made upon him by the state of terror which weighed at that time upon the great city : ' The state of prostration and stupor was such (it is Droz who is speaking), that if they had said to a condemned man : You will go to your house and there you will wait until the cart passes to-morrow morning to step into it, he would have gone and done as he was told '.

What is not less remarkable in a man who had felt the horror of crimes to such a degree, he was not disgusted with liberty ; when it was over, he did not fall into a state of fear and dislike of moderate progress and knowledge. We should not imitate, he said, those ancient people who, in the terror caused by Phaethon's conflagration, prayed to the gods for eternal darkness.

He had some vivid impressions at the camp before Mayence in the summer of 1795, and he has related them since ; Sterne could not have felt and expressed them differently :

' A party of the advanced guards of the left attack, he says, were posted in an English garden, near the village of Monback. This garden was completely demolished : the footsteps of the soldiers had turned the little paths into broad roads, and the lilacs and honeysuckles which bordered them were a mere wreck. In front, a sort of kiosk served the Austrians as a guard-house. The nearest springs of water were on their side, but the woods were behind us. Several times during the day, the French would throw their canteens over to the Austrians, who would fill them with water and throw them back. When evening approached, our soldiers, after laying in a stock of wood for the night, would collect a store for the enemy's posts and carry faggots between the vedettes of the two armies. Thus, whilst awaiting the signal to slay each other, the guards lived in peace, and made mutual exchanges like those between friendly tribes. This sight moved me deeply : seeing the men still good and kind on a ground that was upheaved and stained with blood, I often found it difficult to keep back my tears '.

The military career could not long satisfy this man of

peace. After bravely doing his duty as a citizen, he returned to his home ; on account of his delicate health he was granted his final discharge in the year IV, and was able to devote himself wholly to his taste for letters and moral philosophy. He was married in November, 1794, at the age of twenty-one, to a young woman 'whose amiable qualities were depicted on her charming countenance'. Their happiness lasted forty-seven years, and he was able to say of his love for her, 'that it never degenerated into friendship'. These points are essential to indicate the early character of a talent which, in the most diverse writings, will show the inspiration of piety and domestic happiness.

At the foundation of the Central School at Besançon, Droz, appointed Professor of Belles-Lettres, and with Nodier for his pupil among others, began to make himself known by several printed treatises, by an *Essay on the Art of Oratory* (1799), which shows evidence of learning and accuracy, and which already proclaim his inclinations and the direction of his mind. A pleasing solemnity of tone, which will be henceforth the habitual rhythm of his thought, finds expression in them. The author sees very well that the power of forming great men cannot be reduced to an art ; but he thinks that *the art of making men good* might be carried a long way. To the many qualities necessary in an orator should be joined, in Droz' opinion, that of sensibility : 'Great strength of mind seems, at the first glance, to exclude it : but elevation is the point that unites them'. Nor is elevation of soul enough in the orator, unless really combined with virtue ; in insisting upon that, Droz is not re-echoing a commonplace of morality, but is giving the result of incontestable practical observations : 'Believe me that in no people is there so much immorality, he says, that the reputation of the orator is indifferent to his listeners'. When later, as a historian of the Revolution, he has to speak of Mirabeau, whose greatness he appreciated so highly, what an opportunity he had to verify that so necessary side of moral authority, in which Mirabeau was wanting ! Below genius, which is the unique gift of nature, there are still other and noble ranks, and Droz takes a delight in pointing them out to young men of talent as honourable degrees in which they may become useful and merit esteem. 'And perhaps,

he adds, that is the lot we should pray for for those whose happiness we desire; with higher faculties one may rise to many dangers'. Thus, at its first steps, this lofty and justly tempered soul itself circumscribes the limits of its desire and marks its level in advance.

In this *Essay on the Art of Oratory*, he is a disciple of Blair; in his other treatises of that time, he seems to be in philosophy a disciple of Condillac, of Garat, of the masters of the day; but, judging by something pure and affectionate in his nature, by what the English call *feeling*, we have a notion that, if he develops in any degree, he will have more points of affinity with those fellow countrymen of Blair, the Stewarts, the Fergusons, the Beatties, with that moral and economical school, by turns occupied with the useful and the beautiful, at once philosophical and religious. M. Droz, without saying or thinking so, belongs by instinct to the Scotch school or family; his true parents are there. At this period, in some *Observations sur les maitrises, sur les réglemens, les privilèges et les prohibitions* which concern the progress of industry (1801), he declared in favour of a wise, not an absolute liberty; he admitted some restrictions, without any exclusions, and gave evidence of practical and positive knowledge. Thus we see him from the beginning disposed to embrace with a reasonable equality of talent a great diversity of studies, all animated by the same spirit—the desire to contribute to the moral improvement, the happiness and the well-being of the greatest possible number of his fellow creatures.

His occupations as professor left him time to pay an annual visit to Paris, and, after the closing of the Central Schools, he went there for good (1803). His line of studies and writings had brought him into rather intimate relations with the members of the society of Auteuil, with Tracy and Cabanis. The latter loved Droz and opened his heart to him. This writer, who aroused so much clamour, and who was supposed, from his celebrated work, to have desired to maternalize the whole of man, had a brilliant imagination: 'Those with whom he conversed, says M. Droz, he always made better, because he supposed them to be good like himself; because he was thoroughly convinced that the truth will spread over the whole earth; and because no efforts for the good of mankind could

appear troublesome to him. His soft but animated words flowed with an elegant facility. When, in his garden at Auteuil, I listened to him with delight, he vividly reminded me of one of those philosophers of Greece who, under the shady foliage, taught their greedily listening disciples'. I record these words not to paint Cabanis so much as Droz himself. A man of piety, he afterwards loved to mingle Ducis and Cabanis in his regrets and affections; he remembered the latter on account of his lofty scepticism and his semi-religious hope, to which Cabanis gave expression in his *Letter to Fauriel*, and which was really the final phase of his thought. Thus did Droz at all times; he tried to bring together and reconcile to the best of his power; he was more inclined to seize upon the points of resemblance which unite men, than the differences which separate them. Only at the last extremity does he trace the line of demarcation and the gulf between them and himself. With La Rochefoucauld, with the Abbé Galiani for example, when he reads them, when he hears them expressing their principles and their maxims, he stops, he is indignant, because there is here no possibility of doubt and the intention is betrayed by the tone. He could never get through *Candide*; for, observe, the indignation of the honest man once, though tardily, aroused in him, never compromised. But wherever he feels human warmth and as long as there is a shade of affection, he hopes.

Cabanis said to him one day: 'You want to publish a work on morality, a serious work; begin rather with a novel. If it is a failure, it will not do you any harm; if it is a success, it will make you known'. Thus *Lina* was written, which appeared in 1804. It is a novel in letter form, quite pastoral, exhaling the innocence of youth and almost of boyhood. The principal scenes are laid in the Canton of Appenzel, in the house of a Protestant pastor. There is in this novel as it were a blended echo of Florian and Werther; it is Werther after Gessner and Oberlin. It seems that M. Droz attached little importance to this novel, and did not include it among his collected works. The biographer loves to discover in it the first colour of that sweet and pure imagination. Three white rose-buds, which should have been offered to Lina on her fête-day, blossomed only to adorn her grave: 'If I were to see

the young women wearing *three white rose-buds* in their hair, in memory of a real event that I have recalled, I declare that I should be prouder than if all the Academies of the Empire had decided that my work is faultless'. I am told that his wish was accomplished, and that *roses à la Lina* were in fashion for a season.

After *Lina*, M. Droz published his *Essay on the Art of being Happy* (1806). It is a confession, a disclosure; it is the delicate and harmonious effusion of a chaste soul, of a calm and elevated soul, animated by a pure zeal, which has discovered the secret of happiness for itself, and would like to communicate it to others. But on this point which concerns them so nearly, men are more rebellious than one thinks: every one wishes to be happy or unhappy in his own way. To be able thus to control one's desires, they must be very temperate to begin with. Those whose desires are ardent are much more likely to chafe and show irritation at these counsels of a mild wisdom, which recall to our mind the slow conversations, the calm bearing of Termosiris and those smiling old men in Fénelon. Ask a poet who has said that life flows in *purple streams* through his veins, to take a pleasure in slackening and moderating it, as if they were streams of milk or honey. On the ocean around the Cape of Good Hope there is a gigantic bird, the albatross, which, as soon as the sea becomes tempestuous, takes a delight in skimming over the immense waves. When it comes to the verge of the trade winds, this bird immediately turns and plunges back into the stormy regions. Mirabeau delighted in struggling in the storm; and did not the noble Vauvenargues himself say:

'A somewhat bold turn of imagination often opens out to us paths full of light. . . . Let them believe who will, that we are miserable in the toils of great designs. Virtue suffers in idleness and pettiness, when a timid caution prevents it from taking its flight and makes it grovel in bonds; but even misfortune has its charms in great extremities; for this hostility of fortune raises up a brave spirit, and makes it gather all its strength, which it has not used hitherto'.

M. Droz knew all this long before we did; something of the same kind had been urged in the criticisms of his work which appeared in the newspapers. He replied to them in one of the numbers of the *Décade*¹ (July 1,

¹ *La Décade* had at that time changed its name to *La Revue philosophique littéraire et politique*.

1806) What was his aim? After Horace, after Socrates and Franklin, after all the moralists, he had merely loved to converse on the universal theme, to recall a few truths to those minds that had recovered from their first ambitions, and were capable of hearing them; he had hoped especially to communicate them to young minds, to those who should read him in the age of generous resolutions. For my part, it seems to me that it is a good, useful and necessary thing for the stability of the world that the group of those who are bitter, misanthropic and hot-tempered should be counterbalanced by the family of those who are inspired by an unchangeable indulgence. Chamfort in his bitterness exclaimed: 'Every man who has reached the age of forty without being a misanthrope, has never loved his fellow men'! M. Droz would reply to him: 'There is no such thing as a perfect misanthrope; you think you are one, but your very vivacity belies you'. But especially men of the nature of Droz, those meek and gentle beings, will answer Chamfort and the impatient by their mere existence and forbearance. Whatever idea we may have formed of the mass of men, we cannot altogether hate them, when we see among them some who are as incorrigibly good and just as he was.

The succeeding ages, in fact, and the often sad experience which they bring with them, far from souring and impairing in M. Droz the original benignity of his heart, only matured and confirmed it in virtue; old age only brought him a higher degree of tenderness, which became, so to say, a fixed serenity. An ancient poet¹ who is regarded as a sage has said: 'Foolish and very puerile are the men who bewail death, and who do not bewail the vanished flower of youth'! M. Droz was not one of them; he had inhaled youth without plucking it in its bloom; he had the fruit, and he said to himself with Montaigne, and with him enjoying everything in its season: 'I have seen it in the herb, in the flower, and in the fruit; and I see it in its withered state: *happily, since it is natural*'. One day I heard him expounding to somebody who was lamenting over the tedium of old age, the delights and advantages of that state, as a man who was not recalling Cicero's Treatise, but rediscovering it.

¹ The poet Mimnermus.

I have been unconsciously anticipating, and I will turn back. In 1811 M. Droz competed for the Academy prize for a Eulogy of Montaigne, and this agreeable treatise, which obtained distinction from the Academy, forms a sort of complement to the *Essay on the Art of being Happy*. Certainly Montaigne is not probed as deeply as he might have been in this graceful Eulogy: I will not say that M. Droz wrongly ascribed anything to Montaigne, though he does go rather far when he says that 'candour and reverie were painted on his brow'; but, in reading Montaigne, M. Droz was chiefly fascinated by the smiling, familiar, human and affectionate side of the author of the *Essays*; he saw in him, if not an excellent teacher, at least a good friend; he proceeded with Montaigne as he had done with Cabanis; he communicated with him through the sympathetic quality which united their two natures. This Eulogy, which he composed almost entirely with a happy tissue of sentences picked out of Montaigne, betrays, both by its tone and its thought, a just mind, a correct ear, a sensitive, noble, elevated soul. Later, when he returned to positive and practical Christianity, M. Droz did not abjure this first cult for Montaigne: here we may be allowed to express some astonishment no doubt, and to differ from him in opinion. Montaigne, in fact, is pure nature, that allows itself every liberty, that gratifies all its whims; and the law of *grace*, Christianity, came not only to control nature, but to turn and force it back, and, as they say, to circumcise it. To M. Droz, as I have pointed out already, these absolute and trenchant ways of looking at things were repugnant; even after embracing and submitting himself to a quite practical and precise religion, he preferred not to define its spirit too rigorously. According to him the Gospel came to perfect and accomplish the law of nature rather than to reverse it; it came to bring peace and harmony to man, rather than a sword; and this amiable sage, a disciple of Fénelon in that respect, avoiding the rocks and precipices upon which others will come to grief, contrived to pass over a level road, and along the flowery paths of human wisdom, to the higher paths from which, with the people and the disciples, one may hear the divine Sermon on the Mount.

I have said enough, it seems to me, to present M. Droz in that first form of a sympathetic and benevolent mora-

list; I will not follow him any longer through the works which have reference to that side of him. Under the Empire he, like so many other men of talent and merit, found a refuge and a tutelary shelter in the offices of M. Français (of Nantes), who under his title of Director-General of Excises concealed a real Mæcenas. He left that office in 1814, and since then he had no other function but that of a writer and man of letters. The Restoration, as long as it kept within the paths of moderation, seemed made to satisfy his wishes and to respond to his political ideal. In the various newspapers on which he worked from 1816 to 1820, he never expresses any but views of conciliation and hope. Under the Empire, there had formed around the venerable and warm-hearted Ducis a little society comprising MM. Andrieux, Picard, Auger, Roger, Campenon and Droz; Collin d'Harleville, who died too soon, was missed. They met regularly; they breakfasted or dined together every week with frugality and gaiety, and when Ducis arrived in Paris from Versailles, it was quite a festival. The old poet celebrated the charm of these little gatherings in an *Epistle to Droz*, whom he pictured in his modest interior:

Goûtez votre bonheur, Couple aimable et sensible;
 Dieu rassembra pour vous, sous votre toit paisible,
 Des trésors de raison, et de grâce et d'esprit;
 L'art de se rendre heureux dans vos mœurs lut écrit.

Several of those who formed these little gatherings were already members of the French Academy; soon they summoned the others to the same body. Droz entered in 1824, the last of the society and certainly not the least worthy.

A year before (1823), he had published, in partnership with Picard, a novel called *Les Mémoires de Jacques Fauvel*; it is a resuscitated Gil Blas, half gay, half sentimental. M. Droz remarked that more than one critic had gone wrong in trying to allot to each of the collaborators his share of the work: sometimes a slightly humorous idea had occurred to him, and Picard had provided a thread of sentiment. It would be an interesting point to remark, if the novel were not, taken as a whole, too feeble.

On the subject of Droz' various writings on the applica-

tion of morality to politics, and on political economy, itself conceived from a philanthropic point of view, I will make only one remark, which will reply to an objection which I have often heard made against works of this nature : men of action, men of the profession, are generally inclined to regard them as useless, and only qualified to persuade those who are already convinced. M. Droz raised this same objection against himself, and he replied to it : ' There is a peaceful, slow, but sure revolution, which is the work of time, and which leads mankind to better destinies. Every good man assists this revolution whenever he contributes, either to propagate the principles of morality, or to spread the operations of industry '. The sudden breaking out of revolutions due to the passions of men no doubt frequently disturb this general and gradual progress of things ; the dam that the wise try to construct suddenly finds itself submerged. But the waters flow away, the inundation subsides, and the dam imperceptibly continues its existence. The fact is that, thanks to the friendly rivalry of writers occupied in spreading healthy ideas on economy and morals, peaceful ideas, the action of hostile writers is kept in check ; the level of public morality is maintained. Many violent crimes, many wars for example, which formerly were so easy to kindle, become almost impossible to-day in face of the check exercised by sentiment and universal interest. Writers like M. Droz assist in secularising Christianity, and, in that direction, their action is not wasted, their influence makes itself felt in the long run. '*Beati mites . . . Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*' ! To apply this prophecy to-day would be going too far, and would raise a smile ; but, seeing the difficulties that lie in the way of general wars breaking out to-day, we must admit that the *meek* have won their share of influence in the government of the earth.

I come to M. Droz' most serious and most enduring work, a work that will secure him a definitive rank among the best minds. Before his *History of the Reign of Louis XVI*, M. Droz had written works worthy of esteem ; ' but the subjects he treated did not give him occasion to exhibit such deep studies, such lofty views, so solid a judgment, so exquisite and just a political sense '. This is the testimony of a man whose words, worthy of consideration at

all times, have assumed more authority through his noble death; it was thus that M. Rossi appreciated M. Droz' History. As early as 1811, M. Droz began to devote himself to the study of the *Reign of Louis XVI*, considered *during the years when it was possible to prevent or to direct the French Revolution*. The two first volumes of his work were not published till 1839, and the third in 1842. For thirty years then he was meditating over this historical subject, most pregnant in moral reflections; he read everything that was printed on the subject, he questioned the best informed contemporaries; he owed to the confidence his character inspired the privilege of consulting unpublished Memoirs; in a word, he neglected no research, no inquiry, to get at the truth. 'I have constantly kept myself, he says, in the mental state that a jurymen should assume before listening to the depositions of witnesses; and now I should venture, like him, to pronounce the solemn formula by which the verdict is accompanied'.

The *Introduction* which summarizes the history of France from Louis XIV and during the whole of the eighteenth century until the moment when Louis XVI ascended the throne, presents a fine and serious picture full of truth and precision. M. Droz' manner here becomes more pronounced than it had habitually been hitherto; it sometimes rises to energy: 'It was thought, he said of Mme de Pompadour, that this woman, in losing her charms, would also lose her power; but Mme de Pompadour in her maturity was still necessary to Louis XV: *she dispensed him from reigning*'. The Chancellor de Maupeou is painted in a vigorous and witty portrait. The different phases of public opinion are grasped with subtlety and rendered with considerable vivacity. The moralist appears in more than one place without any excess of optimism; the economist comes to the aid of the historian for the lucid exposition of financial questions. As he proceeded on his way, M. Droz came across a superior man who had been too much neglected, and placed him in the light: that is the Minister Machault, whose project might have restored order in the finances, and who was sacrificed to an intrigue. We pass in review the various orders of the State, the different classes of society, as we approach the reign of Louis XVI. Wherein did the spirit of the nobility then ruling in France differ from the aristo-

cratic spirit? M. Droz tells us in a word: 'The real aristocracy respects and upholds the laws; the nobility regard themselves as above the laws'. The spirit of the *gown* nobility is delicately distinguished from that of the *sword* nobility and of the Court nobility: 'The magistrates look upon the military caste as an obedient machine; they esteem themselves more independent, more educated, more disinterested than the people at Court; and they had *pride* (*morgue*) where the others had *vanity*'. All the shades of inequality which made up the ancien régime, and which caused such deep offence to self-esteem, in proportion as ambition was awakening in all ranks, are faithfully analysed by the historian; he is not less careful to point out the causes of the *rapprochement* of the different classes, the precursory signs of the approaching accession to power of the Third Estate. In reading this severe picture at the beginning, we are at once sensible how much the talent of M. Droz profited by the study of history. In his other writings, and when he in part created his subjects, he persisted too much in his own opinion, if we may be allowed to say so; he had earnestness, but he lacked the irony of a Socrates or a Franklin. It is good for a talent to react upon itself and to thwart its nature a little in order to strengthen and fortify it; that is the kind of service which the study of history rendered M. Droz. It made him grapple with reality as a whole; in it he retained his pure, clear, limpid qualities; he developed the expression of a more virile probity, and in this final and long meditated work, he was able at last to show what he could do.

The ruling idea of his History is as follows: it would have been possible, if a strong and intelligent man had found himself invested with power at the right time, to control the French Revolution, to prevent it from degenerating into blind violence and anarchy, and to bring it into port without having first traversed and exhausted all the storms. I fear that this art of directing revolutions and moderating their passions is in a like case with the art of being happy and controlling one's desires; that is easy and possible only when the passions are already dulled. In '89, an enthusiasm, an almost universal illusion seized upon all minds and carried them beyond their goal: those who opposed the reforms did so with an

anger which was not less violent, not less exaggerated than were the ambitions and pretensions of the others. In this ardent conflict, there were no doubt moments which might have been decisive if a powerful man had appeared to seize and arrest them in their passage. M. Droz, from the high bank on which he is seated, and with the reflection of a sage, delights in pointing out to us where those fleeting moments might have come in : but what could they avail without the able and superior man who alone could have taken advantage of them, could have given them some sort of historical existence, and turned them into veritable epochs ?

The group of men upon whom M. Droz fixes his attention, and whom he is fond of designating as having had a forecast of the most reasonable aim of the French Revolution, comprises Mounier, Malouet, Lally-Tolendal, Clermont-Tonnerre, the group of impartialists who desired at that time two Chambers and a constitutional monarchy, that famous monarchy, so often defined, ever desired and beyond our reach, which we thought we possessed for a moment under the Restoration, which we flattered ourselves on having found and reconstructed in secret during the eighteen years of the reign of Louis-Philippe, and which speculative thinkers perhaps still cherish in idea and dream about. Though this manner of studying history is a little ideal and conjectural, it does not prevent M. Droz from setting forth, in an accurate and luminous narrative, the march of events, and forming a correct appreciation of the men. He intended at first to terminate his work at the moment when the draught of the Constitution, presented by Mounier and his friends, is rejected, and when the principal members of that party resign and retire (September 20, 1789). With them reason is vanquished and the blind movement commences. But soon M. Droz perceived that in revolution it was not well to resign so soon, that there existed a man of genius, the only one that the movement of '89 produced, Mirabeau, and that as long as this powerful mortal lived, there was no occasion to despair entirely of a political guidance. In a third volume which he added to the two others, M. Droz therefore brought the history of the Revolution down to the day after the death of Mirabeau ; that great figure dominates the whole of this third volume, the most remark-

able, the most interesting and the most novel by reason of the nature and the stamp of its precise revelations. The excellent Memoirs on Mirabeau published by his adoptive son, M. Lucas-Montigny, seemed to have given us everything ; M. Droz, by dint of researches, by dint of testimonies of all kinds of which he was the confidant and depositary, was able to add to it. Thanks to him, what he calls the *three phases* of Mirabeau's political life from '89 till his death, the particular circumstances and the vicissitudes of his relations with the Court, are henceforth as far elucidated as we may expect, and, whatever our judgment may be of the character of the man, Mirabeau's genius stands out all the greater. It is piquant to see that just, pure and upright mind of M. Droz diving into the heart of that so complicated nature of Mirabeau, and coming up every time with an admiration disturbed by pain and regret. For the rest, Mirabeau himself openly justified the excellent historian, when, cursing that reputation for immorality which clung to his steps, which compromised and corrupted his best acts at their very source, he exclaimed more than once, with a sense of his power : ' I am paying very dearly for the faults of my youth. . . . Poor France ! they are making thee pay for them too '.

We have sufficiently indicated the merits of this principal work of M. Droz, which is his one title to fame that will not perish. The reading he had to do to gain his profound knowledge of those stormy and polluted times of the eighteenth century, often contrasted with that delicate purity and those family virtues which he exercised and so much appreciated in his inner circle ; in his innocence he was pained by it and plunged back with the more relish into the pure atmosphere of domestic felicity. His last years were consecrated to the loftiest as well as the humblest meditations that the sage can set before himself. His faith had become strengthened and regularized without being narrowed. The *Thoughts on Christianity* and the *Confessions of a Christian Philosopher*, which he published successively, testify to the loftiness, the extent and the ardour of his supreme serenity, and depict for us the celestial day of his horizons. The gradual weakening and slackening of life had not diminished the vivacity of his affections and his soul. He expired one day without

pain in the arms of his dear ones, and seemed to verify in every way that beautiful thought of Marcus Aurelius : ' We should pass that moment of life comformably with our nature, and meekly submit to our dissolution, like a ripe olive, which, in falling, seems to bless the earth which has borne it, and give thanks to the wood that has produced it '.

In those times of confusion and turbulence, this life and nature of M. Droz have appeared to me like an image that is reposing, and that it was good to recall. When almost everywhere we see the daring race of Japhet and Prometheus reigning and triumphing, I desired to show you one of the race of Shem.

FREDERICK THE GREAT AS LITTÉRATEUR

Monday, December 16, 1850.

I HAVE already attempted to isolate Frederick the king and politician in his highest and truest form, the historic and non-anecdotic Frederick. It was thus that he himself thought that great men should be definitively judged, without time wasted over accessories, and from a height which commands their contradictions and eccentricities. However Frederick's inner and private life is fully known; every part of his character has been illuminated; we have his letters, his poems, his pamphlets, his humours and facetiæ, his confidences of every sort; he took no measures to suppress them, and it is impossible not to see in him another quite essential personage, lying at the very heart of the man. We may say that, in the case of Frederick, if one side of the great king showed the philosopher, he was also interwoven with a man of letters.

The great Cardinal de Richelieu was like him: to have composed a fine tragedy would have been almost as pleasant a thing to his heart and would have appeared to him almost as glorious a work as triumphing over the Spaniards and supporting the allies of France in Germany: the laurels won by the *Cid* kept him awake at nights. At the close of the Seven Years' War, when d'Alembert visited Frederick at Potsdam and spoke to him of his fame, he wrote: 'He told me with the greatest simplicity that that war was to be furiously discounted; that chance could claim almost the whole of it, and that he would much rather have written *Athalie* than carried through that war'. This way of looking at military triumphs truly smacks of the philosopher; but the preference given to *Athalie* also betrays the man of letters. I am not sure that Frederick would not have retracted, if a malicious genius had taken him at his word and had really given

him the choice between the Seven Years' War and *Athalie*, or rather I am very sure that in the end the king would have carried the day : but the heart of the poet would have bled within him, and, in order to interpret his character as we are doing, we shall be satisfied if he had hesitated for a single moment.

When one studies Frederick in his writings, in his Correspondence, chiefly in that which he exchanged with Voltaire, one fact, it seems to me, becomes evident : the man of letters existed in him before anything else, even before the king. What he was perhaps before anything else by nature, and most naïvely, if we may say so, and most primitively, was still a man of letters, a *dilettante*, a virtuoso, with a keen relish for the arts, with a passion and a cult above all for the intellect. To expand in that direction he had but to let himself go. His royal state, his love of noble glory, and the lofty character with which he was endowed, turned his energies in other directions, which aimed at social utility and the greatness of his nation : he was of opinion ' that a strong mind is susceptible of all sorts of forms, that it brings its inclinations to everything it wishes to undertake. *It is like a Proteus who changes his shape without any trouble, and really appears the object he represents* '. So he appeared to be born for everything he had to do as king ; he was equal to his task. ' The strength of States, he thought, consists in the great men whom nature has appropriately brought into existence in them '. He wished to be, and he was, one of those great men ; he worthily fulfilled his function as a hero. This nation which the Great Elector before him had roughly modelled, he finished by giving it a shape, a body, by imprinting upon it the unity of spirit : Prussia did not really exist until after it left his hands. Such is the part that the great Frederick played in history ; but, in reality, his secret tastes, which were rather anything but secret, his real pleasure consisted in talking over every matter, in following out his philosopher's thoughts, and also in committing them to paper, whether seriously or playfully, as a poetaster and writer.

He had been brought up by a Frenchman, a man of merit, named Duhan, who had inspired him with a love of our language and our literature. He had been initiated into a sort of direct tradition by the French refugees at

Berlin. This desire for fame which the young soul of Frederick nursed and which was still seeking its object, naturally made him turn his eyes towards France. The age of Louis XIV, now ended, gradually extended its influence over the whole of Europe. Brandenburg was lagging behind the other nations; in that there was nothing to astonish; but Frederick felt humiliated, and said to himself that it was his part to inaugurate ~~that~~ new era of a Northern Renaissance. As long as his father was living, this purely literary desire of Frederick prevailed over his other thoughts and urged him to a course of conduct and to make advances which were hardly becoming to the future king. He was Prince Royal and twenty-four years of age when he began his Correspondence with Voltaire (1736). Voltaire was at that time living at Cirey with Mme Du Châtelet. He received from the young Prince of Prussia, not so much a letter of compliments as a really passionate declaration. We may smile to-day at this first letter, quite awkward still and more than half Teutonic, in which Frederick mingles his admiration for Wolff with that for Voltaire, and speaks to the latter in the name of the *kindness (douceur) and support 'which you show to all those who devote themselves to the arts and sciences'*. Through the singular style of Frederick's first letters we may detect the noblest thought. Regarding Voltaire from a distance and through his works alone, embracing him with that enthusiasm of youth which it is an honourable thing to have felt at least once in life, Frederick proclaims him the sole heir of the great century which has just ended, 'the greatest man in France and a mortal who does honour to speech'. He admires him and bows to him, as Vauvenargues will soon bow to him, without as yet having a glimpse of the faults of the man, and on account only of the beauty of his intellect and the charm of his language. Consequently he declares himself his disciple, his disciple not only in his writings, but in his actions; for, deceived by the distance and by the gilded cloud of youth, he sees in him almost a Lysurgus and a Solon, a legislator and a sage. Do not smile however. No man ever had a better sense than this young prince of the power of Letters in their highest inspiration, of the elevated and useful influence they exercise, of the durability and the immortality of the fame

they give. 'I count it as one of the greatest pieces of good fortune of my life to have been born a contemporary of a man of a merit as distinguished as yours. . . .' This feeling stands out conspicuously in all this phase of the Correspondence. Voltaire is charmed, Voltaire is flattering; he thanks, he praises, he enchants; one would not really think that he was laughing in his sleeve, and no doubt at that time he did not indeed laugh so very much at a few solecisms and the homeliness of tone that often accompanied this Northern tribute. To believe him, the young prince writes poetry like *Catullus in the time of Cæsar*; he plays the flute like *Telemachus*; he is *Augustus-Frederick-Virgil*. Enough, says Frederick to him, here resuming his advantage in respect of good sense and good taste in manners: 'I am, I assure you, neither a kind of great man nor a candidate for that honour; I am only a simple individual who is known only on a small part of the Continent, and whose name, to all appearance, will never serve any other purpose but to adorn some genealogical tree, and then drop into obscurity and oblivion'. That is how he judges himself, and at that date he was right; this man of twenty-five feels that he is nobody as yet and that he has not even commenced: 'When persons of a certain rank, he remarks, accomplish the half of a course, they are awarded the prize that others receive only after accomplishing the whole of it'. And he becomes indignant at this difference of measure, as if princes were to be regarded as of an inferior nature to other men, and less capable of a complete action.

One day Voltaire had the effrontery to tell him that he, Frederick, wrote a better French than Louis XIV, that Louis XIV could not spell, and other rubbish of the same kind; as if Louis XIV had not been one of the best masters of speech in his kingdom, and as if it was not one of the greatest pieces of praise that could be given to the excellent writer Pellisson, that he was on more than one occasion a worthy secretary to Louis XIV. Here again Frederick stops Voltaire short and gives him a lesson in tact: 'Louis XIV, he says, was a great prince from an infinite number of sides; a solecism, a mistake in spelling, could not tarnish for a moment the brilliancy of his reputation, founded on so many actions which have made him immortal. It beseemed him in every sense to say: *Cæsar est*

supra grammaticam. . . . I am not great in anything. I have only my application which may perhaps some day make me useful to my country ; and that is all the glory that I aspire to'. Among the insipidities and sometimes ridiculous exaggerations of this beginning of the Correspondence, we are glad to come across these occasional passages which betray the future king, the superior man, who, in spite of his *fury* to rhyme and to produce his first works, will successfully triumph over it through a more lofty passion, and who will never be a rhetorician on the throne. In everything, even in these plays of wit, Frederick always gives his last word to action, to the welfare of society and that of his country : he is a genius indulging in pastimes whilst awaiting something better, and he will continue to amuse and enjoy himself in the intervals of ruder labours, but at all times he will aspire, by dint of firmness, to become a reality in practical and useful grandeur. For him there is a time to laugh, to play the flute, to write poetry, and a time to reign. The man of letters may for a time outweigh the king and sport before him, but he will always make way for him when necessary, and at the right moment. We may say of him that never did any of his talents, any of his passions or even his manias encroach upon any one of his duties.

From the point of view of good taste, we might remark many things. The rude and somewhat coarse nature of the Vandal betrays itself in Frederick even through the man of intellect and the *dilettante* greedy to learn and to please. Not only is it the language and expression that fail him and offer resistance, it is often a delicate tact that is wanting. Whenever he speaks to Voltaire of Mme Du Châtelet, he can hardly help being coarse or ridiculous : 'I have too much respect for the ties of friendship, he writes to him at Cirey, to wish to tear you from the arms of *Émilie*. . . .' When he tries to be gallant, that is the frivolous tone he adopts. Frederick can think of nothing more graceful than to make Voltaire a present of a bust of Socrates, the patient sage *par excellence* ; which might have appeared a sarcasm, if he had known his poet better at that time. But this Socrates reminds Frederick of Alcibiades, and so we have more than one equivocal and risky allusion, into which by the way Voltaire does not disdain to enter. All this savours

of the Goth and the Herulian of great wit, but with a polish which is merely superficial, and with more than one corner that has no polish at all. It takes some time for this rough diamond to come away from its matrix.

Yet Frederick takes shape quickly; he takes shape visibly in this Correspondence, and there comes a moment when he masters and handles his French prose so well as to really hold his own against Voltaire. As to his poetry, we are forced to despair of him: in this respect his throat will ever remain hoarse and harsh, and he will never improve. He will say for example without any embarrassment:

Les myrtes, les lauriers, soignés dans ces cantons,
Attendent que, cueillis par les mains d'Émilie . . .

or again:

Que vous dirai-je, ô tendre Ovide ?
Vous dédites l'Art d'aimer

Those are his smallest faults. On this subject of poetry, let us have done with Frederick. He knew very well that with him this mania was a foible and almost an absurdity, that he would be praised to his face and called *Cotin* behind his back. 'That man, Voltaire said one day, pointing to a pile of papers covered with the King's scribbles, do you see? is Caesar and the Abbé Cotin'. An eminent English historian, M. Macaulay, improved on Voltaire's words, and called Frederick a compound of *Mithridates* and *Trissotin*. Frederick knew or suspected all this, and still gave way to his ardour for writing verses. Having been very much in love in his early youth with a young woman who was fond of poetry, he was stung by the tarantula, and, very effectually cured of the one malady (that of falling in love with young women), he was never cured of the other. It was impossible to offer him any objections or reproaches on that head that he had not a hundred times repeated to himself: 'I have the misfortune, he wrote, to love poetry, and often to write some very poor stuff. What should disgust me with it and would discourage any reasonable person, is just the spur that incites me most. I say to myself: Poor little man! you have not been able to succeed so far; take heart!' . . . He will say to himself again: 'Whoever

is not a poet at twenty, will never become one all his life long. . . . No man, who is not born a Frenchman, or has long lived in Paris, can hope to possess the language to the degree of perfection so necessary to compose good verse or elegant prose'. He will compare himself with the vine 'which will always smack of the soil in which it is planted'. But after all it amuses him, it distracts and relaxes his mind in the intervals of his great affairs, and he will go on rhyming to the end. He likewise composed music in the Italian style, *solos* by the hundred, and they say that he played the flute to perfection; which did not prevent Diderot from saying: 'It is a great pity that the mouth-piece of that fine flute should be spoiled by a few grains of Brandenburg sand'.

In Germany, where people write dissertations on every subject, they have written on Frederick's books and libraries, on his favourite authors, and from these they have drawn inferences with regard to the nature and quality of his tastes. Because in his letters he calls d'Alembert *my dear Anaxagoras*, they have gone so far as to suppose that he had a certain predilection for the philosophy of Anaxagoras. Those are commentators' refinements and subtleties. To obtain information with regard to Frederick's real intellectual tastes, it is enough to hear his own natural words in his divers Correspondences. He knew antiquity only through translations, and French translations; he could therefore form a good estimate only of the substance of those things that survive that kind of transportation from one language to another. The poetic beauty of the ancients escaped him entirely; he did not even suspect it. He had a good estimate of the historians, who formed, properly speaking, the matter of his study and meditation: yet, when we see him lavish the title of Thucydides on Rollin or even on Voltaire, we are forced to admit that he seems to have no inkling of the particular form that constitutes the originality of that great historian. He naturally formed a better judgment of Polybius, in whom the substance is of greater import than the form; a critic of true merit (M. Egger) points out to me that between Frederick the historian and Polybius there are some real and rather striking points of resemblance. The reflections with which Frederick ends up his account of the Seven Years' War are very like a page of Polybius: 'At a

distance of two thousand years, we see the same manner of judging human vicissitudes, and of explaining them as games of skill mingled with games of chance'. Only the historian-king is in general more sober of reflections. Frederick also had a good estimate of the ancient moralists and philosophers, or even of the philosopher-poets in whom thought predominates, such as Lucretius: 'When I am in affliction, he said, I read the third book of Lucretius, and that soothes me'. Still, even in what formed the subject of his private reading, he was so uncritical in the matter of erudition, that he happened by inadvertence to range Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius among the number of *Latin* authors. Among the moderns, he especially prized Locke and Bayle, those *breast-high* philosophers, whom he was tempted to place a little too near or even above the great somewhat imaginative inventors, as Leibniz or Descartes, whose errors offended him. He was fond of making sport of transcendental geometry as a useless thing, and on that point had to be recalled to order by d'Alembert. His learning turned more readily in the direction of practical morality and its social application; in that respect he came near to Voltaire, who was himself as practical as it is possible for a writer to be, and he might have said with him: '*I go to facts, that is my motto*'.

Of German literature Frederick hardly makes any mention; he is very sensible of its deficiencies, which were still without any compensation at that date, heaviness, diffuseness, division into dialects, and he points to some of the remedies. And yet he foresees some fine days in the near future for this national literature, and he predicts them: '*I announce them to you, they will appear*'! He does not suspect that those fine days have brilliantly dawned towards the end of his life, and that Goethe has already come. But can we be astonished that Frederick did not appreciate *Werther*?

To sum up, everything that was virile and robust thought went straight to his sensible and vigorous mind. For the rest, we become too well aware that he is more or less out of his element; in everything that may be called invention or poetry, he had only brilliant outlines, native sallies which were principally scattered over his conversation, but which became deadened under his pen or clumsily

turned to imitation and almost to pasticcio. In his admiration for Voltaire there was a part of truth and justice, there entered into it also a part of error and illusion. He was delightfully sensible of *the gaiety of that brilliant imagination*. He relished that lively, familiar, playful genius. 'It is not given to everybody, he said, *to make the spirit laugh*'. One could not better describe that kind of attraction, of luminous and scintillating gift peculiar to Voltaire. Towards the end, and whilst wishing him the *sweetest* feelings, he saluted him again as 'the finest voice of reason and truth'. All this is as well felt as it is justly expressed. But when Frederick admired in Voltaire the great poet *par excellence*, when he saw in *La Henriade* the *nec plus ultra* of epopees, and ranked it far above the *Iliads* and the *Æneids*, he merely proved his lack of ideal, and the limitations of his horizon in that direction. The great objects of comparison had remained outside of his range and his view: he spoke on that matter quite like a man who had never either seen or conceived the supreme and true beauty.

'What pleasures surpass those of the mind?' Frederick exclaimed at the age of twenty-five—the mind, that is to say reason, brilliant, gay and lively. He thought the same at all times, and therein lies all the secret of his passion for Voltaire. This passion (that is indeed the word) was besides reciprocated: Voltaire cannot disguise it; he himself, the great coquette, was captivated by Frederick, and in the witty but wretched and untrustworthy libel, which was his revenge, after his flight from Berlin, he cannot refrain from saying, when speaking of the suppers at Potsdam: 'The suppers were very agreeable. I do not know if I am mistaken, *but it seems to me that there was a great deal of wit*; the King was witty and made others witty'. Observe the attraction even in the anger. There we have the irresistible fascination which they exercised upon one another, and which survived even friendship. The second part of the Correspondence, when they resumed it after the quarrel, bears quite a different character from that of the first half. All illusion has gone, and there remains only that keen relish for wit that still manifests itself. Besides, the original and youthfully enthusiastic Frederick has vanished; he has given place to the philosopher, the superior man

of experience who no longer feels his way in anything. The king in him also more frequently asserts himself. On both sides they tell each other truths, and (what is more rare) they tolerate them. Voltaire tells the King a few, and Frederick pays him back in kind: 'You have done me great wrong, he writes to Voltaire. . . . I have pardoned you everything, and will even try to forget everything. But if you had not had to do with a *madman in love with your fine genius*, you would not have got off so cheaply. . . .' However, after these severe words, which are too firm not to be just, after these royal words, how easily the *madman, in love* with the other's brilliant wit, still shows himself, when he adds:

'Do you want some sweets? very good; I will tell you some truths. I esteem in you the finest genius that the ages have borne; I admire your verse, I admire your prose, *especially those little detached pieces of your Mélanges de Littérature*. No writer before you ever had so fine a touch, so sure and delicate a taste as you have. You are charming in conversation; you know how to instruct and amuse at the same time. You are the most fascinating creature I know, able to make all the world love you when you please. *You have so many intellectual charms, that you can offend and at the same time merit the indulgence of those who know you.* In short you would be perfect if you were not a man'.

Let any one say now that the man who appreciated Voltaire to that degree, and who found these French ways of insinuating sweets after the bitters, was not the man of most wit of his time beside and opposite to Voltaire!

When one has read a certain *Portrait* of Voltaire by Frederick (1756), a *Portrait* drawn in all his nudity, by the hand of a master, and displaying a perfect sureness of eye, one can enter more fully into the sense of that phrase we have just read, where he says that that fascinating genius has such graces, that he will soon again captivate even those he has offended and who know him¹.

I think I rather stopped short of the truth, when* I said that the intellectual attraction of these two men for one another survived even friendship; for it becomes

¹ It appears to have been proved that this remarkable *Portrait* of Voltaire, found among Frederick's papers, is not his work; he confined himself to ratifying its justness by copying it with his own hand.

evident, after reading in good faith the whole continuation and end of this Correspondence, that even friendship is not dead with them, that it has revived, bringing back with it a remnant of charm mingled with reason, and that it is based, not on amusement merely, but on the serious and elevated sides of their nature. Whilst combating the ever irascible and choleric instincts of the aged Voltaire, Frederick extols and favours to the best of his ability his humane and benevolent inclinations. He delights in praising, in encouraging in him the defender of humanity, of tolerance, the man who brings under cultivation and repeoples the almost desert tract of country around Ferney, just as he himself peopled the sandy wastes of Brandenburg; in a word, he recognizes and embraces in the great practical poet his collaborator in social work and civilization. With a remnant of cult, and, if you please, of a still pathetic idolatry, in all the comparisons he sets up between them, he always gives Voltaire the advantage, and that in a feeling tone whose sincerity is above suspicion. Speaking of that future of *perfected reason*, of which he can hardly perceive the dawn, and of which, sceptic though he is, he does not entirely despair for the future of humanity, he says: 'For man everything depends upon the time when he comes into this world. Although I came too soon, I do not regret it: *I have seen Voltaire*; and, if I do not see him any longer, I read him and he writes to me'. From such accents we might divine, though he does not tell it, the passion which was still the most profound and the most deeply laid in Frederick, that which the living Voltaire personified in his eyes: 'My last passion will be that for Letters'! It had been the first too.

Frederick's relations with d'Alembert were of quite a different nature from his connexion with Voltaire; they were never so strong, but they were durable and solid. It was not merely a natural inclination which bore Frederick to d'Alembert: 'We princes all have an interested soul, said Frederick, and we never make any acquaintances but we have some particular views, which directly concern our profit'. Frederick had long thought of attracting d'Alembert to Berlin to make him President of his Academy. This purpose became quite serious after the death of Maupertuis, and when Frederick had

done with the Seven Years' War. I have before my eyes the manuscript and unpublished Collection of the Letters written by d'Alembert to Mlle de Lespinasse during his stay with the King of Prussia.¹ In June, 1763, d'Alembert paid Frederick a visit, the latter being at the time in his Westphalian States; he joined him at Gueldres, and accompanied him to Potsdam. D'Alembert had already seen Frederick a few years before; on seeing him again, he is struck at finding him again superior to his fame. Frederick had that character peculiar to great men, that the first sight of him surpassed even one's expectation. He begins by chatting with d'Alembert for four hours on end; he speaks simply and unassumingly of philosophy, of Letters, of peace, of war, of everything. At this date, that is to say only three months after the conclusion of peace, Frederick had already built 4,500 houses in the ruined villages; two years later (October, 1765), he will have built no less than 14,500. With d'Alembert we remark at once that organizing and even peaceful side of the soldier. Frederick's amiable, familiar and fascinating side is perfectly indicated in our traveller's narrative: the prudent and unassuming guest had not the time or the wish to perceive the failings which often impaired that stock of wisdom and charm. Honours however do not turn d'Alembert's head: he is sensible of them, but he is not intoxicated. In passing through the States of Brunswick he has dined at the table of the ducal family, and they called him *Marquis*: he submitted to the title after a slight protest. Apparently, he said, that was the etiquette. With Frederick there is no etiquette, and everything goes off as with a private person, a man of genius. D'Alembert could easily have made himself necessary to Frederick by his conversation, just as Frederick could easily become necessary to d'Alembert. The time was past of the brilliant suppers at Potsdam, the last days of which Voltaire had seen and contributed to: the familiar table-companions of that time, the friends of the King's youth, were dead or had grown old at this* second period. The King was not only the most agreeable man in his kingdom; if we except Earl Marischal, he was

¹ This Collection is at present among the manuscripts in the National Library.

the only one: 'He is almost the only person in his kingdom, says d'Alembert, with whom one can converse, or at least hold that kind of conversation which is hardly known outside of France, and which, when one has once known it, becomes a necessity'. D'Alembert never wearies of speaking of the King's affability, his gaiety, the lights he brings to every subject, his good administration, his devotion to the well-being of his people, the *justice* and the *justness* which characterize all his opinions. On Jean-Jacques, for example: 'The King speaks very well, I think, about Rousseau's works; he finds in them warmth and power, but little logic and truth; he maintains that he only reads for instruction, and that Rousseau's works teach him little or nothing'. With d'Alembert, whose estimable character he appreciated at once, Frederick shows himself purely a philosopher; we see him as he would have loved to be in the second half of his life, when he was not too much soured by the gout and the humours, and if he had had somebody at hand who was worthy to understand him: 'His conversation turns now upon literature, now on philosophy, often enough even on war and politics, sometimes on contempt for life, fame and honours'. That was the circle of human subjects he loved to treat habitually, sincerely, and always in a moralizing tone; but literature and philosophy were still what he especially loved to talk about as a relaxation, after he had done his business as King. All Frederick's good sides are brought into prominence in this narrative, and d'Alembert, who is cautious by the way, takes care not to see anything else during these three months of residence. He is able however to resist the King's favours and delicate offers. One day when he was walking with him in the gardens of Sans-Souci, Frederick picks a rose and presents it to him with the words: 'I would much like to give you something better'. This *something better* was the Presidency of his Academy: it is strange to see the Presidency of an Academy and a rose thus brought together. D'Alembert remains a sage, he remains a philosopher and a friend to the last, and faithful to Mlle de Lespinasse. He returns to France with feelings of gratitude, for ever won to Frederick in heart, but not vanquished.

We must tell the whole truth: a few years later, Frederick one evening read some of his verses to Professor

Thiébault, a good grammarian and an Academician whom d'Alembert had procured for him, and he forgot himself so far as to show him a very biting epigram he had written against d'Alembert himself: this caustic king had been unable to deny himself the malicious pleasure of noting some absurdity he had caught in that honourable character. That was one of Frederick's chief faults; he found it difficult to refrain from saying unkind things to people or writing smart things about them. In the present case he quickly repented of having shown his epigram to Thiébault, and he imposed secrecy upon him; the good d'Alembert never knew of it. But, surrounded, as he was in his private life, by wits who were courtiers and all more or less shallow, Frederick was less scrupulous with regard to them. As soon as he had discovered their weak side, he would prick them pitilessly through those breaks of their cuirass; he made them his laughing-stocks, vented upon their persons his contempt for mankind, and thus acquired a reputation for ill-nature, when he was really no more than a terrible satirist of society. The most witty of these shallow courtiers and these spurious friends, such as the Abbé Bastiani, took an underhand revenge by blackening the King before strangers. M. de Guibert recorded in his *Journal de Voyage* one of these bits of confidence, full of spite and perfidy, to which he showed himself too credulous. It was Frederick's misfortune to be surrounded at all times, and especially towards the end, by only second-rate men of letters, without much elevation of character, who too easily lent themselves to this princely sport. Worthy and self-respecting men like d'Alembert would have obliged him in his turn to respect them. The estimable Thiébault was able to command, in his humble measure, that respect.

After his return to France, d'Alembert continued to correspond with Frederick; and (if we forget the epigram that was never known) this correspondence gives evidence of good sense, real philosophy and even of friendship, on both sides, as much friendship as could possibly exist then between a private person and a monarch. Let us not forget that d'Alembert too has his weaknesses; we know already that the philosophers of the eighteenth century were not much in favour of a liberty of the Press, except when it was to their own advantage: one day

d'Alembert was insulted by some gazetteer or other who edited the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin* in Frederick's own States ; he denounced him to the King. Here Frederick shows himself the true philosopher, the true citizen of modern society, and replies to him :

' I know that a Frenchman, a fellow-countryman of yours, regularly scribbles two sheets of paper every week at Cleves ; I know that his papers are bought, and that a fool will always find a greater fool than himself to read him ; but I can hardly persuade myself that a writer of that stamp can do any injury to your reputation. Ah ! my dear d'Alembert, if you were the King of England, you would have to put up with very different taunts, that your very faithful subjects would provide you with to exercise your patience. If you knew how many infamous writings your dear fellow-countrymen published against me during the war, you would laugh at this miserable scribbler. I did not stoop to read all the outpourings of hatred and envy of my enemies, and I remembered that fine Ode of Horace, *The Sage remains immovable*. . . . '

And he continues to paraphrase the *Justum et tenacem*. . . . In this admirable lesson we recognize the disciple of Bayle on the throne. Another day he will be the disciple of Lucretius. D'Alembert is in grief, a deep and very natural grief : he has lost Mlle de Lespinasse ; he is about to lose Mme Geoffrin. That geometrician, who is so susceptible to friendship, does not fear to unbosom himself to Frederick's soul, and pour out his grief and almost his sobs, and the King replies to him like a friend and a sage, by two or three letters full of philosophical consolation, which should be quoted entire. They breathe a lofty and tender epicureanism, that of a Lucretius speaking to his friend :

' I sympathize with you in the misfortune that has befallen you in the loss of one to whom you were attached. The wounds of the heart are the most keenly felt of all, and, in spite of the fine maxims of the philosophers, only time can cure them. *Man is an animal more sensitive than reasonable*. I have had only too much experience, to my misfortune, of the suffering such a loss causes. The best remedy is to force oneself, to divert one's mind from a painful idea which takes too much root in the mind. You should choose some geometrical occupation that requires much application, to ward off as much as you can those gloomy ideas which keep on renewing themselves. I would propose some better remedies if I knew them.

Cicero, to comfort himself for the death of his dear Tullia, threw himself into composition, and wrote several treatises, some of which have come down to us. Our reason is too weak to overcome the pain of a mortal wound; we must let nature do her part, and say to ourselves above all that at your age as at mine we should rather take comfort in the thought that we shall not be long in rejoining the subjects of our regrets'.

And he urges him to come and spend a few months with him as soon as he is able: 'We will philosophise together on the nothingness of life, on the philosophy of men, on the vanity of Stoicism and all our being'. And he adds, with that blend of the soldier-king and the philosopher, which would appear contradictory if it were not touching on his occasion, 'that he will feel as much joy in soothing his pain as *if he had won a battle*'. Such letters indeed redeem a few notes of harshness which might be found side by side with them and which at intervals recall the presence of the master; they are a reply to those who, judging Frederick only by his hard sayings and his epigrams, deny that he had to the last any feelings of affection, of humanity and, I venture to say, of goodness, just as he had had strong and true feelings of friendship in his youth. For my part, from whatever side I may consider him, and even in those years when his faults were most marked, I cannot but sum up in his favour, and say, as Bolingbroke said of Marlborough: 'He was so great a man, that I have forgotten his vices'. In the present case, the great man had, in spite of all, something good and humane, and a heart at bottom.

In a select edition of Frederick's Works prepared for the use of men of good intellect and taste, I would admit, in order not to have a jumble of the good and the bad, as the vicinity of the latter always spoils the former, only his Histories, two or three at the most of his Dissertations, and his Correspondence: the poems which are contained in his letters would be quite sufficient without the addition of any others. Thus we should have ten volumes or so of strong, wholesome, agreeable and quite instructive reading. Let us drop, when speaking of Frederick, those so often repeated names which are intended to be injurious or flattering, those too contestable names of the Emperor Julian and Marcus Aurelius; on the other hand let us not bring in the name of Lucian, of whom he could only

offer strange parodies ; and, if we wish to define him *classically*, let us define him in his best works as a writer of the highest character, with a stamp of his own, but resembling, by the habit and turn of his thought, at the same time Polybius, Lucretius and Bayle.

THE DUCHESSE DU MAÎNE

Monday, December 23, 1850.

AFTER a king like Frederick, we want a woman, we want a fairy. The Duchesse du Maine was one, and one of the most singular: she deserves to be studied, she and her princely existence, in her little Court of Sceaux, where she appears to us as one of the oddest and most extravagant productions of the reign of Louis XIV, of the monarchical régime carried to excess. Born in 1676, the Duchesse du Maine died in 1753, not quite a hundred years ago. In these hundred years a revolution took place in the order and government of society, in public manners and morals as a whole, great enough to make the existence and the life led by this little fantastic queen to appear to us almost like a tale of the *Arabian Nights*, and to justify our asking seriously: '*Was it indeed possible?*' La Bruyère presaged and already saw something of that profound change which broke out since, when he said: 'Whilst the Great neglect any kind of knowledge, I mean not only that which concerns the interests of Princes and public affairs, but their own affairs; whilst they are ignorant of economy and of all things that the father of a family should know, and glory in that ignorance . . . , citizens inform themselves of the internal and external affairs of a kingdom, they study government, they become astute politicians, they know the strong and weak points of a whole State, they think of bettering their position, they obtain places, they rise, they become powerful, they relieve the Prince of a part of the public cares. The Great who once despised them, now bow down to them, happy if they can become their sons-in-law'. That revolution of which La Bruyère here afforded a glimpse in the form of a harmonious agreement

and a transaction, was not so peaceful, as we know. Out of politeness, La Bruyère there said of the Great what he would not have dared to say of the Princes themselves. The new-comers were not all as conciliatory as the parvenus of La Bruyère's time. All did not end in a *marriage*, and, from 1789 to 1850, the balance, between what remains of the principles of the old society and the growing pretensions of the new, is still to seek.

The Duchesse du Maine, with all her wit, suspected none of these things, and asked herself none of these questions; she believed in her birth rights, in her *demi-god's* prerogatives, as firmly as she believed in the system of Descartes and in her Catechism. Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon was a granddaughter of the great Condé. Her brother, Monsieur le Duc, had had La Bruyère for his tutor, and she may, in some respects, have profited by his tuition. For excellence of language, for wit, for eagerness to know, she showed early promise; like her brother she had some sparks of the wit of her grandfather. But it is to be observed that the mind of a hero, when it is divided and broken up, so to say, among his descendants, sometimes produces some strange forms, or even some strange monstrosities. Everything is on a large scale in these great souls, vices as well as virtues. Some defect which, in the head of the family, was balanced and held in check by a noble quality, suddenly throws off the mask in his descendants, and appears out of proportion. The great Condé had at the bottom of his soul anything but that natural *goodness* for which Bossuet praised him; but his great mind and his valiant heart covered many things. However, it was just as well not to cross him at certain moments; a violent and despotic character, he was easily angered by contradiction, even in a mere discussion of works of the intellect. Boileau became aware of that one day when he had a difference of opinion with him: 'Henceforth, he said, I shall always be of Monsieur le Prince's opinion, especially when he is wrong'. In general the descendants of the great Condé (history may say so to-day, since the race is extinct) were not good. Brutality, carried to the point of ferocity, already showed in the one who was called Monsieur le Duc (the grandson), and in that other Monsieur le Duc, who was Prime Minister after the Regent ;

it broke out openly in the Comte de Charolais. Their violence, their utter inability to bear any contradiction, manifested themselves in bursts of energy and frenzy. The intellect of the great ancestor, however, still persisted with distinction, and distributed itself into brilliant lots, as it were, in the person of more than one offshoot. The Duchesse du Maine was one of the best endowed in this respect. It may be observed that even at this near degree the race was already suffering a physical impoverishment, which showed itself in the stature. The Duchesse du Maine, as well as her sisters, was almost a dwarf; she, who was one of the tallest of the family, had the appearance of a child of ten years of age. When the Duc du Maine married her, when he had the choice of the still unmarried daughters of Monsieur le Prince, he decided in favour of this one, because she was perhaps a few lines taller than her eldest sister. People called them, not the princesses of the blood, but the *dolls of the blood*.

The Duc du Maine, who in 1692, at the age of twenty-two, married this granddaughter of the great Condé, aged sixteen, was the eldest of the bastards whom Louis XIV had had by Mme de Montespan. This little prince, tenderly reared by Mme de Maintenon, who became like a real mother to him, had been formed according to the ideal of the foundress of Saint-Cyr. He was intelligent, he spoke an excellent language, he was pleasant and charming in intimacy, and had been trained to be habitually good and submissive; in a word, he was one of those individuals that are perfect at an early age, that are never emancipated and never grow entirely to manhood. He was club-footed as the result of vicious humours, which increased his natural timidity in society. Well educated, but without any true lights, he was, in the matter of ideas, never to step beyond the rigidly limited horizon in which he had been enclosed since his birth. The Duchess, curious, bold, imperious and fanciful, was no more than he to step beyond that horizon, and all her acts of boldness, all her flights of fancy always kept within the artificial and magic sphere in which she found excitement without ever leaving it.

On the day when Louis XIV, yielding to his son's desire, gave him permission to marry, he could not refrain from saying, in the good sense of his royal prejudice :

'*Those people should never marry*'. He foresaw the confusion and the conflicts which that doubtful brood of *legitimized bastards* might bring into the monarchical order, which was at that time the very constitution of the State. He yielded, however, and towards the end he did his best to increase that confusion by the favours and prerogatives which he never ceased to lavish on those parasitic and adulterous branches.

No sooner married, the little Duchess took her timid husband in hand, and subjected him to her will in everything. She dreamed of fame in the future, of political greatness and power, and, meanwhile, she wished to live as much as possible at her own pleasure and like a sovereign, to yield as little as possible to others and indulge all her whims, to have her own Court, where no star should shine to rival her own. This dream of her imagination she completely realized only after M. du Maine had bought Sceaux of the heirs of M. de Seignelay, at the price of 900,000 livres, and she had made it her Chantilly, her Marly and her Versailles in miniature (1700).

Among the Duc du Maine's tutors there was a certain M. de Malezieu, a man of education, who knew mathematics, literature, Greek and Latin, who could improvise poetry, get up theatricals, who was a good man of business, and 'in his servile condition, as Lemontey said, united the advantages of a universal mediocrity'. This M. de Malezieu, who became the indispensable personage of the Duchess' Court, her oracle on every occasion, and of whom they spoke at Sceaux as of a Pythagoras: '*the Master has said so*', must certainly have possessed more than one good quality; but it is difficult to-day to form a correct idea of his merits. A member of two Academies, of the Academy of Sciences as well as of the French Academy, he was celebrated by Fontenelle who does not greatly overrate him, and describes him, with his *robust and ardent temperament*, and his readiness to do the meanest offices. Voltaire spoke of him with more vivacity as of a man in whom the profoundest learning had not stifled genius: 'He would sometimes, in presence of Your Most Serene Highness (*Mme du Maine*) take up a Sophocles, a Euripides; he would instantly translate one of their tragedies into French. The admiration, the enthusiasm which seized

him, would inspire him with expressions that corresponded to the virile and harmonious power of the Greek lines, as far as it is possible to approach them in the prose of a language that has hardly issued from barbarism. . . . However M. de Malezieu, with an effort produced by a sudden enthusiasm, and by a vehement recitation, seemed to make up for the poverty of the language, and put into his declamation all the soul of the great Athenians'. There we have a eulogy which might give a lofty idea of the person; but we must not forget that these expressions of Voltaire are contained in a Dedicatory Epistle. The Memoirs of Mme de Staal (de Launay) exhibit M. de Malezieu under a less favourable light: ceremonious, demonstrative and shallow, without much discernment at bottom, when he had no use for that discernment, and when the mind needed to be assisted by a little heart. M. de Malezieu was to all appearance one of those men who derive their activity from a robust temperament, and combine astuteness with it; who, with an original extensive and solid groundwork of studies which they never increase, afterwards apply themselves solely to turning them to account in the world of society, and making them a source of profit in the houses of great people. He was a man of education and wit, who could only appear a genius in a coterie. He found that coterie at Sceaux, and, by dint of activity and inventiveness, he managed to fill it, for more than twenty-five years, with the idea of his merit and sublimity. At three leagues from Paris, people would say without a smile: *the great Malezieu!*

M. de Malezieu had even been one of the causes of the acquisition of Sceaux. Already rich by the liberalities of the Court, he had a pretty country-house at Châtenay, and there he entertained the Duchesse du Maine, who honoured him with a visit in the summer of 1699, and to whom he offered a gallant hospitality; there she remained during her pregnancy, whilst the Court was at Fontainebleau. There were continual games, fêtes and fireworks in her honour, the whole contrived with a certain air of innocence suggestive of the golden age. The people around contributed to these joys by songs and dances; it was during the first tranquil days after the conclusion of the Peace of Ryswick.

The Duchess there commenced that life of fairy-land and mythology in which she took so much delight, that she soon desired no other life, and the idea occurred to her to obtain possession of the whole valley. The description of this first sojourn by one of Malezieu's colleagues, the Abbé Genest, which was addressed to Mlle de Scudéry, is rather piquant and tells us the origin of that long-continued playing at shepherds which was to become the very existence of the Duchess. There were gallant surprises at every step, innocent games at every hour: they play at being nymphs and shepherdesses; as a prelude to future prodigalities they even play at economy: 'M. le Duc du Maine complained on rising from the card-table, we read in Genest's account, of having lost *two crowns*; the princesses congratulated themselves on their fortune in having won about the same amount'. In these fêtes and those which were renewed in the same place in the following years, we see M. de Malezieu admirably doing the honours of his house, and like an all-round man filling and animating all this little sphere. One can understand that he was worthy of being at once the Molière, the Descartes and the Pythagoras of the kingdom of Lilliput.

Madame la Duchesse du Maine, says Fontenelle, desired that there should enter some idea, some invention, even into these pleasures, *that the enjoyment should be intellectual*. When to-day we read the account of these fêtes in the Collection entitled *Les Divertissements de Sceaux*, we must admit that M. de Malezieu put into them, in spite of all their insipidities, that *intellect* which the fairy demanded.

Before long the whole of this pretty valley of Sceaux became the Duchess' park, her little kingdom, so to say, and her *Temple*. She could not appear upon the scene without the *Sylvan of Châtenay* or the *Nymph of Aulnay* coming to do homage to her in person; even the Plessis-Piquet had its manner of rustic divinity. There the Abbé Genest had chosen his hermitage, from which he came to pay his devotions to the *Lady of Sceaux*.

But who was this Abbé Genest? Oh! something very singular and very amusing, I assure you, the least solemn of French Academicians (for he was one of the Forty), the most difficult to celebrate in a public sitting

of that body. D'Olivet made up for the official Eulogy by a familiar letter. The Abbé Genest was, like Socrates, the son of a midwife; he had started as a tradesman, dealing in trumpery wares, then he was a prisoner in London, then a copyist, a tutor, a horse-dealer, a secretary to the Duc de Nevers, a fine wit withal, who could turn you out poetry with a native ease and gaiety. He had gained an *accessit* and a prize for poetry at the French Academy in 1671 and in 1673; that brought him into notice. He ingratiated himself with Pellisson, and, through him, with the tutors of the Dauphin, with Bossuet and others. He assisted at the Conferences on Physics of the famous Rohault, and conceived the rather odd idea of putting Descartes' philosophy into verse. In short, he knew M. de Malezieu, who appreciated him, *utilized* him, and made him his accomplice in his games and his poetical society entertainments. The Abbé Genest played the double part of poet and jester, a combination which princes have always loved (even in our time). They laughed at him, and he submitted to be laughed at; he had a most remarkable singularity, which did not prejudice his fortune: that was an enormous nose, but a nose of which it appears that we can form no idea. How often the Duc de Bourgogne and the Duc du Maine joked like schoolboys at the expense of their tutor's nose! Even Louis XIV unbended on one occasion, and laughed a natural laugh at one of the tricks of which this Abbé with the royal nose was the victim. They even discovered an anagram in the name *Charles Genest*, with a little accommodation: *Eh! c'est large nez* (Oh! what a large nose). For propriety's sake I will skip many of the pleasantries which were aimed at quite a different object,—what shall I say?—which related to the too habitual and too incomplete manner in which the Abbé Genest, on his absent-minded days, fastened *the garment which the English do not dare to name*: those pleasantries are of a nature to find a place only in *Le Lutrin vivant*. Thanks to such real and diverse merits, at Châtenay, at Sceaux, at Saint-Maur, the facetious Abbé's assistance was required at all the rustic and bucolic fêtes:

Parmi les dieux des bois, surtout n'oubliez pas
Celui vêtu de noir qui porte des rabats.

Avec cet habit et ce nez,
Ce nez long de plus de deux aunes,
Il faut donc que ce soit le *magister* des Faunes.

There we have follies. To sum up without too much frivolity, the Duchesse du Maine studied Cartesianism with M. de Malezieu; she read with and through him Virgil, Terence, Sophocles, Euripides, and she was soon able to read a portion of the authors, the Latin ones at least, in the originals. She studied astronomy besides, still with that all-round M. de Malezieu, who knew enough of it and to spare to explain Fontenelle's *Pluralité des Mondes*; she put her eye to the telescope, to the microscope too, and sought instruction in short on all things with passion, by fits and starts, when the whim was on her, but without becoming any more enlightened on the whole. With all this she played in comedies and pastorals at every hour of the day and night, suggested ideas to be turned into madrigals by her two purveyors, the eternal Malezieu and the Abbé Genest, invited and gathered around her a crowd of chosen ones, gave occupation to all, tired them out, never suffered any delay in the execution of the least of her desires, and bestirred herself with an indefatigable *demonry*, for fear of being left for a single moment to her own thoughts and to ennui. As for sleep, with all these all-night pleasures, it was out of the question; she had been persuaded that it was only made for mere mortals.

From the literary point of view which, whether near or distant, is always the point of view that we take up, the disadvantage of this fast and noisy life was that it was incompatible with true taste. Really good taste is discriminating and examines; it has its times for repose, and it chooses. Here native wit attempted everything, but there was no discrimination, no choice: the Duchess played indifferently *Athalie*, *Iphigénie en Tauride* (faithfully translated from Euripides), or *Azaneth*, the wife of Joseph, in the tragedy of *Joseph* by the Abbé Genest.

What did it matter to her, provided that she made a name for herself, found an outlet for all her emotions, and reigned? They compared her to the greatest queens who had loved learning, to Queen Christina, to the Princess Palatine Elizabeth, the friend of Descartes, and they awarded her the primacy. The President de Mesmes

(who was First President of Parliament) sent her, with a New Year's offering, a poem he had had written in the style of the chivalric romances, in Marotic style, according to the fashion of the moment, and in which he styled himself the most puissant Emperor of Hindustan writing to *the more than perfect Princess Ludovise, Empress of Sceaux*. On both sides the masquerade was complete. Even in looking into her mirror, the Duchess thought herself beautiful, but she could not disguise from herself the fact that she was little. At the time of her marriage they had designed an emblem for her, and written a motto: a *bee*, with these words from Tasso's *Aminata*: '*Piccola sì, ma fa pur gravi le ferite*'. . . . She is little, but she deals cruel wounds'. Later they took occasion, during the early days of Sceaux, to form a society of those persons who most frequently had the honour of being invited, with the title *Order of the Bee*. Regulations and statutes were drawn up; a medal was struck on the occasion: all the members of the Order had to wear this medal with a *citron-coloured ribbon*, when they were at Sceaux. This mark of distinction was much sought after. Thirty-nine persons were nominated and took the prescribed oath: they swore by *Mount Hymettus*. On that day they played at Greece.

Meanwhile, the last war of Louis XIV, the War of the Spanish Succession, had broken out and was inflaming Europe; fortune began to withdraw her favours; the nations began to be drained of their money and their blood; the Duc du Maine did not distinguish himself by his valour in the army; but, at Sceaux, the Duchess, radiant with hope and pride, continued to play and enjoy herself. She swam, as Saint-Simon said, in the joy of her future grandeur. The full brilliance, the splendour of what they called the *Great Nights* of Sceaux, is referred to these very years of disaster. The scandal of these ruinous fêtes and diversions became all the greater, or at least the more crying, as the misfortunes of the royal family came to be added to those of France; but the death of the principal direct heirs brought the Duc du Maine nearer to power, even to the throne; each round of the ladder less in the order of legitimate succession was one step

¹ This is the original passage from the *Aminata* (Act II, scene^a):
Picciola è l'ape, e fa col picciol morso
Pur gravi e pur moleste le ferite.

higher in the scaffolding of his fortune. It is well known that the weakness of Louis XIV, importuned by that of Mme de Maintenon, that more than nursing-mother of the Duc du Maine, went so far towards the end as to make the bastards the equals in every respect of the legitimate princes of the blood, to declare them definitively qualified to succeed to the throne; and his last will, if it had been followed, would have procured to the Duc du Maine the most influential rôle in the future Regency.

The curious may seek in the so-called *Recueil de Maurepas* (in the National Library) the scathing couplets and noëls of which the Duc and the Duchesse du Maine formed the theme on the occasion of these odious favours; these couplets are not too witty and are, in general, too indecent to be quoted here. There is a good deal of idle gossip about this Duchess, who was always spoken of by her official poets as *the modern Penelope*. I will only touch in a few words upon this delicate subject. Monsieur le Duc (de Bourbon), the Duchess' own brother, was at one time taken with a strong penchant for her; this sort of penchant was not uncommon in the family of the Condés. The brother and sister exchanged little love poems between Saint-Maur and Sceaux, which Malezieu and Genest rhymed for Mme du Maine, whilst Monsieur le Duc employed Chaulieu and La Fare for the same purpose. At last they quarrelled, but not until there had been a great deal of talk and satire. Perhaps it was undeserved, for we read in one of these verse letters of Mme du Maine:

Ce qui chez les mortels est une effronterie,
Entre nous autres Demi-Dieux
N'est qu'une honnête galanterie.

After this first gossip on Monsieur le Duc, there was still talk, but of a subordinate kind, of the President de Mesmes, whose allegiance the Duchess wished to secure in order to govern the Parliament through him. But the Cardinal de Polignac appears to have been the favourite most in view, and fragments of his letters have even been quoted as deciding the point. This Cardinal, so agreeable in person and so witty, seemed expressly made for this Court à la Rambouillet. He was always engaged upon his great poem *L'Anti-Lucrèce*, in which he supported

in Latin verses the good principles of theology and morality: he read it and explained it to the Duchess, and M. du Maine amused himself with translating the cantos. One day when this prince was showing one of the cantos he had translated to the Duchess, she lost her patience and said to him: 'One fine morning you will wake up to find yourself a member of the French Academy, and M. d'Orléans will be Regent of the kingdom'.

Ambition was in fact smouldering under that life of games and comedies; in this pygmy's body, in this extract of the great Condé, there were sparks of that same civil fury. Of human sentiment or patriotism there is never any need to speak in connexion with these unique beings who think themselves of the lineage of Jupiter: the nation and the world were made for them; they believed it in all sincerity, and they acted with a high hand in consequence. Mme du Maine had declared it, on the eve of the Regency (1714), to two dukes and peers whom she had summoned to Sceaux to talk over *eventualities*, as we should say, and as she did not say; for if she thought badly, she spoke better than we do. She wished to make sure of a party in the Parliament, to obtain support in the case of quibbles raised against the right she believed she had acquired. Seeing those whom she addressed to be reserved and on their guard, she fell into a passion, as she always did when she met with the slightest resistance, and said to them, 'when once one had acquired the qualification to succeed to the crown, one must, rather than have it withdrawn, *set fire to the centre and the four corners of the kingdom*'. There we see the spirit of the great Condé in all its purity. When Louis XIV was dead and the will annulled, exasperated by anger, she had no rest until she had put this evil threat into execution.

This interrupted the games at Sceaux a little, and there are two times, two distinct epochs in that prolonged mythological life of pleasures, in what I may call that life *between two walls of verdure*: the first epoch, that of hopes, of proud intoxication, and of ambition concealed beneath the flowers; then the second epoch, after the failure of the enterprise, after the disappointment and the miscalculation, if we may employ these words; for, even after such a fall, after the degradation from rank

and the outrage, after the miscarriage of the conspiracy and the imprisonment, this incorrigible nature, returning to her accustomed haunts, recovered without too great an effort the same pride, the same intoxication, the same self-infatuation, the same faculty for active and noisy illusion, just as at the age of seventy she was in her own eyes still young and still a shepherdess. No one, with the same wit, was ever more naïvely a goddess and a shepherdess than the Duchesse du Maine. She played her comedies to her very last day, and without ever having an idea that it was all a comedy.

'Place me ever at the feet of Madame la Duchesse du Maine, wrote Voltaire from Berlin in 1752 (she was then seventy-six years of age). She is a predestined soul; she will love comedy till her last moment, and when she is sick, I advise you to administer to her some fine play instead of the Extreme Unction. One dies as one has lived. . . .' Add, to complete the portrait, that though she loved comedy to that extent and was continually playing it, she played it badly, and was all the more applauded.

Could not a serious lesson be derived from the mere sight of such an existence and such a nature, which to-day appear to us fabulous? Somebody said of Mme du Maine 'that, in her whole life, she never went out of her own house, and that *she had not even put her head out of the window*'. The philosophers, some philosophers at least, have supposed that if a human being, after birth and during its first movements, met with no resistance in its contact with surrounding things, it would come to make no distinction between itself and the outside world, and to believe that this world forms parts of itself and its own body, in proportion as it extends its steps and motions. It would become convinced that all else is but a dependence and an extension of its own personal being; it would say in all confidence: *I am the Universe!* It was thus with Mme du Maine; she long realized the dream of the philosophers. She never met with any resistance to her desires until the time of the Regency. She had early placed herself in such a situation as to meet with none, by shutting herself up in that little Court of Sceaux, where everything was hers and identical with her. Any other will but her own would have seemed to her an

impertinence and a revolt. When she came out of it however and had to do with real difficulties, she felt the shock and was broken. In that mad conspiracy, which she entered from spite against the Regency (1718), and into which she pushed her timid husband, she was able to see that the world was bigger, more rebellious, more difficult to move than she thought. Any other person would have derived some lesson from it, or at least would have felt some sadness and mortification; but the force of nature and first impressions conquered. On her return to Sceaux after a rude ordeal of humiliation and disgrace (1720), she gradually returned to the conditions in which she had first lived; she found no more resistance than before and forgot that any existed for her a few yards outside her valley. She remained convinced as before that the order of the world, when things went right, was that everything existed for her and her alone. In a word, to resume the previous comparison, she was like a person who has once fallen from the first floor without doing himself too much injury, but who for all that has never put, and never will put, his head out of the window.

We may speak of Mme du Maine with thorough knowledge and as if we had had personal acquaintance with her, for we have with respect to her the most direct, the most intimate and the surest testimony. She had taken into her service, in the autumn of 1711, with the title of *femme de chambre*, a lady of merit who would not have disgraced any rank, qualified to be the equal and the rival in wit of the most distinguished of the time, combining seriousness and cheerfulness, and with a heart that was still worthy of esteem, even when it was dried up. Mlle de Launay remained at her mistress' side for more than forty years, and she has left amusing *Memoirs*, which have long been admired for the quality of their language and the charm of their narrative. In reading Mlle de Launay and following her through the divers vicissitudes of her servile condition, we cannot help re-echoing La Bruyère's words: 'The advantage of the Great over other men is immense in one respect. I do not begrudge them their good living, their sumptuous furniture, their hounds, their horses, their apes, their dwarfs, their jesters and their flatterers: but I envy them the good fortune of having in their service people who are their equals in

heart and mind, and who are often superior to them'. Mlle de Launay herself, who has not yet perhaps been placed in her proper rank as a moralist, represents in my mind a female La Bruyère, posted in her princess' alcove; she does not tell everything, but she sees everything, and, whilst measuring her words, she engraves her observations the more concisely and indelibly.

She has admirably rendered the talent of expressing herself which was peculiar to the Duchesse du Maine; and which attracted her attention at the very first: 'I gave her my whole attention, and without any effort, says Mlle de Launay; for no one ever spoke more correctly, more clearly and rapidly, in a more dignified and natural way. Her wit employs neither turns nor figures, nor anything of what is called inventiveness. *Strongly impressed by objects, her mind gives them back as the glass of a mirror reflects them, without adding, omitting or changing anything*'. It would be impossible to express more saliently the naturalness, the perfection, and even the justness in a certain sense, of that mind and that quick speech, which was so much at home in the midst of an artificial world. In the Duchesse du Maine the expression was equal, neither more nor less, to the impression; and both were always clear and vivid. 'Language is perfect only when you speak it or when others are speaking of you', wrote Mme de Lambert to her. Take away the compliment, and the praise remains the same as that we have just read.

All those who spoke of her observed that *precise turn* in her wit and that *justness* in her brilliance: she belonged to that school of the end of the seventeenth century, in which Mme de Maintenon had taught that long sentences are a mistake.

Mlle de Launay gives us a peep, by the way, into the succession of whims, ambitions and games of that spoiled, witty and arbitrary child. She gives us a picture of her and of herself at her side, conspiring all night long with her pen in her hand, and trying, by means of memoranda and writings, to raise up against the Regent a Fronde that still bore the stamp of wit and intellect. After the double imprisonment that the Princess and the *femme de chambre* had to undergo, an imprisonment which did not reflect much honour on the one and which was the glory of the

other, Mlle de Launay, enobled in the eyes of the world by her constancy, returns to Sceaux with her mistress, who rewards her by putting her (with a few shades of difference however) on a footing with her ladies. The little Court is gradually repeopled and reanimated: the round of pleasures begins over again. They re-enter into the full stream of dreams and delirium. But a rather piquant episode might find its place here, if we were writing a history of the Queen of Sceaux.

During her visits to Paris Mlle de Launay used to see Mme de Lambert and attend her *Tuesdays*: that was the day on which Fontenelle, La Motte, Mairan, the Abbé Mongault, and a few other Academicians and wits, assembled at her house. Now, it happened that Mlle de Launay and Mme de Lambert read on this Tuesday some letters they had received from the Duchesse du Maine, who, informed of this honour done to her letters, pretended to be alarmed at their being produced in so learned and formidable a company. The result was a Correspondence between her and La Motte (1726). The latter was fifty-four years of age at the time and blind; the Duchess was about fifty. The blind wit began to play the lover, and Mme du Maine the shepherdess and the *ingénue*. The point of the Correspondence was to make a *Most Serene Highness* understand that he was in love with her without mentioning the word love, to turn this gallant idea over and over in every direction, to simulate an ardour still kept within the terms of respect, in short to obtain favours from her. The first of these favours was that she should sign her name in full: *Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon*. La Motte's game was to say that this *Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon* did not last long, giving to understand that he devoured it with kisses when he was alone. He clamorously asks for another signature: 'I have almost worn out the first, he writes, with your permission'.

O Molière, the Molière of the *Précieuses*, where wast thou? Nothing could give one a better idea than this subtilized and quintessentialized Correspondence of the fatiguing efforts of those who, passing their lives at Sceaux in saying witty things morning and evening, could not refrain from crying mercy, and called that little Court the *Galley of Wit*¹.

¹ The amiable Prince de Ligne said: 'I think that I should have been

At this second period at Sceaux the Duchesse du Maine had at the head of those she called her *swains* the witty Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire, who composed his celebrated quatrain for her, and who was nearly ninety years of age : the old swain had a singularly rejuvenating effect upon the Duchess ; she appeared hardly more than a child beside him. Somehow or other she combined piety with all her other doings, gallant, bucolic and mythological. One day when she was urging M. de Sainte-Aulaire to go to confession with her, he replied :

Ma Bergère, j'ai beau chercher,
Je n'ai rien sur ma conscience.
De grâce, faites-moi pécher :
Après je ferai pénitence.

To which she made a rather wanton repartee for a *précieuse* and one who had just played the *ingénue* with La Motte :

Si je cédaï à ton instance,
On te verrait bien empêché,
Mais plus encore du péché
Que de la pénitence.

Voltaire too was one of the guests, if not one of the swains of Sceaux, and he paid several visits there which may be remembered. In the autumn of 1746, having endangered his safety by one of those incautious acts which were so habitual to him, he came one evening to ask refuge of the Duchesse du Maine, who concealed him in an out-of-the-way apartment, the blinds of which were closed all day. Voltaire worked there by candle-light ; for two months he wrote there a number of his pretty Tales, notably *Zadig*, and every evening he would come down to regale the Princess with them, who, not being of sleepy habits, slept less than ever on those nights. Other apparitions of Voltaire might be mentioned at the little Court of the Duchesse du Maine, each of which was singular in its way.

In spite of this appreciation of wit and intellect and of the men who were best endowed with it, we cannot say that the influence of the Court of Sceaux was at all

bored at the Duchesse du Maine's ; her wit too needed a push (*elle avait aussi un tour d'épaule dans l'esprit*). Sceaux was the country residence of the Hôtel de Rambouillet'.

profitable to letters, or that it inspired any literature. We are not sensible indeed of that fruitful and life-giving activity which presupposes a real fire-centre. We see, there only a magic circle traced from the beginning, in which already matured wits came and expended their homage at the feet of the local divinity, and vied in their efforts to amuse her. The side of this little Court which strikes me most forcibly and which appears to be the only one that makes it worthy of being remembered, is still the moral side, the side which is concerned with the human observation of prejudices, eccentricities and absurdities. If you would study in a perfect model, and through a lens as it were, the pretty egotism, the fanciful and coquettish despotism of a princess of the blood of the olden time, her artless and absolute inability to conceive the existence of anything else in the world besides herself, go to Sceaux: there you will see all those big failings in epitome and in miniature, just as we see big gold fish moving about in the sun-light in a transparent bowl. You will see that spoiled child of sixty and more, who has learned nothing by experience, for experience supposes reflection and introspection; you will see her to the very last gathering the crowd and the throng around her; to those who show their astonishment she will reply: 'I am so unfortunately constituted that I cannot do without things I do not care for'. Every room of that palace of Armida must be occupied, no matter how or by whom; nothing is so much dreaded as an empty space:

'The desire to be surrounded increases from day to day, wrote Mme de Staal (de Launay) to Mme Du Deffand, and I foresee that, if you keep an apartment without occupying it, there will be great expressions of regret that you are making somebody lose something, whatever it may be. *The Great, by dint of spreading themselves, become so transparent, that one can see daylight through them: it is a fine study to contemplate them; I know of nothing that leads one more surely to philosophy*'.

That is what Mlle de Launay, our La Bruyère of this place, observed; and she crowns her *Memoirs* with a *Portrait* of the Duchesse du Maine, which should be transcribed at full length, so finished and perfect is it, and so well does it sum up the whole species in the person of the most curious individual. It is a most delicate

piece of moral physiology: I will quote the principal touches:

'Madame la Duchesse du Maine, at the age of sixty, has not yet learned anything by experience; she is a child of much wit; she has all the failings and charms of that character. Curious and credulous, she has sought instruction in all the different branches of knowledge; but she has been content with skimming the surface. The decisions of those who brought her up have become to her principles and rules, on which her mind has never entertained the slightest doubt; she has complied with them once for all. *Her stock of ideas is ready made; she would reject the best demonstrated truths, she would resist the best arguments, if they contradicted the first impressions she has received.* All investigation is impossible with her want of thought, and a state of doubt is one that her weakness could not tolerate. Her Catechism and Descartes' Philosophy are two systems that she understands equally well.

'... The idea she has of herself is a prejudice that she has received like all her other opinions. *She believes in herself in the same way that she believes in God and in Descartes, without any examination or discussion.* Her mirror has not enabled her to entertain the slightest doubt with regard to the charms of her face: she will doubt the evidence of her own eyes rather than the opinion of those who have decided that she is beautiful in face and figure. Her vanity is of a singular nature; but it appears less offensive, because it is not the result of reflection, although indeed it is the more ridiculous.

'Intercourse with her is a slavery, her tyranny is unconcealed; she does not deign to colour it with a semblance of friendship. She said ingenuously that *it was her misfortune that she could not do without the people she does not care for.* She proves it in fact. She will receive with indifference the news of the death of people who made her shed tears when they were a quarter of an hour late for a game or a promenade'.

That want of feeling was literally verified on the occasion of the death of the Duchesse d'Estrées, which occurred almost suddenly at Anet (September, 1747). That Duchess appeared to be indispensable to Mme du Maine, she had become the superintendent of her pleasures, the Malezieu of the last years. She was buried; 'then the curtain dropped, and they spoke of her no more'. The author of the *Portrait* continues in this way to describe all the artless vices of her princess, all her virtues without a soul and without a tie, her religion without any piety, her profusion without any generosity, *many acquisitions*

without any true knowledge, 'all the outward demonstrations of friendship without the feeling', not the least trace of human reciprocity and sympathy: 'One can have no conversation with her; she does not care about being understood, she is satisfied with being listened to'. And seeing her, thus laying herself bare not from a frank disposition, but because she has in her no principle of consideration and attention for others, Mlle de Launay concludes by quoting this saying, which expresses the result of all her study, and which she might very well have invented herself:

'She (the Duchesse du Maine) provoked a person of much wit to say that Princes are in the moral what monstrosities are in the physical world: we see laid bare in them most of the vices that are imperceptible in other men'.

This conclusion is true of all those who are worshipped and who think themselves made to be worshipped, from Nebuchadnezzar to the Duchesse du Maine. But, whilst regarding them with a sort of astonishment (for, in this more or less royal shape, the species is daily becoming extinct), let us try to avoid our own rock of danger and not persist in our pride; remember that in speaking of them we are thinking of ourselves too, that those are failings which might be ours to-morrow, if we were not kept in bounds and warned at every moment by the resistance of objects. Against those people *born demi-gods*, the monstrous product of the old régime, let us in imagination set the *parvenus*, the usual product of a new régime. A *parvenu* on the morrow of a revolution we know, from having seen him, that creature and that *monstrosity* so characteristic of modern society. In vain does man turn over and reverse situations, he does not change his faults or his peculiarities; they all soon reappear again; only they show themselves, according to the times, in a more or less noble, polished and agreeable form; and that form, which combined excessive egotism with a delicacy of mind and polish, is rather that of the past.

FLORIAN¹

Monday, December 30, 1850.

WE shall be again at Sceaux this time : Florian often resided there ; he died there, and there he reposes. We shall not be afraid of speaking, after so many others, of an amiable, popular writer, dear to youth and childhood, the mention of whose name provokes our maturity to a half-disdainful smile. We will not show this disdain to-day ; we will try, without any falsehood or exaggeration, to appreciate at its right worth that talent which was not very elevated, nor very powerful, nor very comprehensive, but which was modest, natural, sincere, and which showed itself gay, lively, fertile, agreeable and refined, when it dared to be entirely itself, and did not leave it's proper sphere. The anniversary of the New Year is a family festival, and Florian is by rights one of the family. At some future New Year, if we are still here, we will speak of that other friend of the family, the author of the *Contes de Fées*, I mean Perrault. To-day we will confine ourselves to the Florian of the *Fables*.

Florian has related the impressions of his childhood and his early adventures, his youthful pranks, in some hastily written pages, conceived in a gay, sometimes a rather loose tone, that savours occasionally of the barracks. In these semi-confessions, published under the title of *Memoirs of a young Spaniard*, he thought proper to disguise the names of persons and places, which leaves some uncertainty on a few, though not very important, points. His family name was *Claris* ; he was born in 1755 in the Lower Cevennes, not far from Anduze, in the château of *Florian* which his grandfather had built. This grandfather had ruined himself in every way, with women, with the masons, and he finally ruined himself

¹ *Florian's Fables*, illustrated edition.

by litigation. Several biographers have made of young Florian's promenades with his grandfather a sentimental picture, an idyll; Florian himself speaks much more lightly of them in his *Memoirs*. What is more to the point is that later, with the money earned with his so well appreciated works, he paid all the debts left him by that spendthrift grandfather, which encumbered the paternal inheritance. Florian's father had served in the cavalry; one of his uncles, who had also been in military service, a great lover of the fair sex, married a niece of Voltaire. This uncle spent a summer at Ferney, and the little Florian went to see him there, when he was ten years of age. He has given a very good account of this first journey (July, 1765). Voltaire was delighted with his pretty ways, his big intelligent eyes, his lively repartees, his natural gaiety, and that great giver of sobriquets on the very first day baptized him *Florianet*, a name which was quite a horoscope. Voltaire made himself so pleasant to him that he soon became little Florianet's favourite:

'Often he had me placed beside him at table; and, while many persons, who had an idea of their own importance, and came to sup with *Lope de Vega* in order to assert their importance, looked and listened, *Lope* (that is the name he gives to Voltaire in the slight disguise of his *Memoirs*) would take a pleasure in talking with a child. The first question he asked me was whether I knew much. "Yes, sir, I said, I know the *Iliad* and the *Blason*". *Lope* began to laugh, and told me the *Fable of the Merchant, the Nobleman, the Shepherd and the King's son*; this fable and the charming way in which he told it convinced me that the art of heraldry was not the most useful branch of learning, and I determined to learn something else"

The future author of the *Fables* could not but remember this early impression and the form in which it came to him. I will say nothing of the many mischievous tricks he tells of, of the decapitated poppies in the garden, on which the boy, full of his *Iliad*, vented his fury like Ajax; he imagined that he was reaping Trojan heroes with his wooden sword. I was nearly forgetting the *exercises* that Voltaire helped him to do on the sly, and which his benevolent tutor, Father Adam, thought so excellent. Father Adam showed them as a masterpiece to Voltaire, who said with a smile that they were not so bad for a boy

of that age. Mlle Clairon was at Ferney at that time; Voltaire arranged a surprise for her name-day, and wrote some pretty lines which were to be sung by a little shepherd and his shepherdess. The little shepherd was no other than Florianet: 'I was dressed in white, and my coat, hat and crook were decked with pink ribbon. A little girl, similarly dressed, helped me to carry a large basket full of flowers'. The little Florian and his shepherdess then sang the song in dialogue, which Voltaire had composed in honour of Mlle Clairon:

Je suis à peine à mon printemps,
Et j'ai déjà des sentiments. . . .

Have we not here, at its very beginning, a whole life in outline? He began with hearing, from Voltaire's lips, a fable of La Fontaine: this lesson bore fruit. He plays at the *Iliad*, he translates it into poppies, laying the whole scene in a garden bed: that is a forecast of *Numa Pompilius*. He plays the part of a white and pink shepherd with his shepherdess: that was already beginning the innocent pastoral of *Estelle and Némorin*. Lastly, that nocturnal fête in honour of Mlle Clairon ends, in Florian's narrative, with a very fine description of the dawn, of the sun rising above the Alpine peaks, which struck his childish imagination: that is the signal of a quite novel sentiment, full of freshness and love of nature, which will be the passion and almost the infatuation of the coming generations. Even while we are with Florian at Voltaire's house, we feel that Rousseau has come.

The little Florian is taken to Paris by his aunt; there he is brought up rather inconsiderately, as a little gentleman. At twelve he has his first little love affair with the youngest of Gresset's nieces. Florianet and the nieces of *Ver-Vert*! in all this there are secret harmonies and sympathies. He enters the service of the Duc de Penthièvre as page, and becomes his favourite. He amuses him with his sallies, with the vivacities of a roguish and witty sprite: 'He gave me the surname *Pulcinella*, which I have borne ever since'. *Florianet*, little *Polichinelle*, always sobriquets and pet-names, to express grace, gaiety and prettiness.

The Duc de Penthièvre, son of the Comte de Toulouse

and nephew of the Duc du Maine, was the last heir of the legitimized bastards, sons of Louis XIV ; a virtuous and charitable man, he washed away, by the use he made of his immense wealth, the impurity of its source. He had a great influence on Florian's destiny ; he arrested in time the traces of libertinism which the influence of Voltaire alone and that of the whole century might have produced in him. Florian's *Memoirs* indeed show that he was rather disposed to freedom and licence. He might easily have become indiscreet, thoughtless, an inconstant lady-killer, a coxcomb, in a word ; but his naturally good disposition, assisted by the moral patronage of the Duc de Penthièvre, controlled and restrained his failings, even though it did not vanquish them. A Captain of dragoons and attached as gentleman of the household to the Duc de Penthièvre, the latter title acted as a check upon him and prevented his becoming a dragoon in every respect.

He entered the career of letters about 1779, under the most smiling auspices. A young officer, who was called by confusion and by rebound a *grand-nephew* of Voltaire, could not but find favour in his wake and on the morrow of his apotheosis. The Chevalier de Florian distinguished himself at first by some pleasing productions which are still perhaps the truest and most original things that he wrote, his *Drama*. Florian's *Drama* is quite his own, and presents shades of gaiety, freshness and sentiment, which assure the author a unique place, as a follower of Marivaux and Sedaine. Florian resuscitated at the *Théâtre-Italien* the kind of plays called *Harlequinades*, which seemed to have gone out of fashion ; but his Harlequin was not like the others. Hitherto Harlequin had been known rather by his doltishness and his jests : Florian tried to put more wit even into his *naïveté*, more delicacy into his clumsiness ; above all he put sentiment into him. His Harlequin, 'always simple and good, always easily deceived, believes what they tell him, does what he is told, and readily falls into the traps that are set for him : nothing astonishes him, everything puzzles him ; he has no sense, he has only sensibility ; he is angered, appeased, afflicted, comforted all at the same moment : his joy and his grief are equally amusing. And yet he is anything but a buffoon ; nor is he a serious

character : he is a *big child* '. That is the Harlequin, as renewed and created by Florian in *Les Deux Billets*, in *Le Bon Ménage*, in *La Bonne Mère* ; a good, gentle, ingenuous Harlequin, as loquacious as he is honest, simple without being stupid, naïve without being silly. Have you seen Perlet playing the part of Michel in Scribe's *Michel et Christine* ? For those who had not seen him, M. Scribe, in order to give an idea of the true spirit of that part, pointed to the *Arlequin-Lubin* of Florian's *La Bonne Mère*. Florian's Harlequins are in some respects confounded with the Lubins, they are so full of bonhomie and sentiment. *Le Bon Ménage*, *Les Jumeaux de Bergame*, Grimm thought very pretty miniatures, which recalled Marivaux, but in which naturalness predominated. Grimm recognized and welcomed this new character that the author had given to the part of Harlequin : ' We are sometimes tempted to say to him : *You are Harlequin, sir, and you cry !* But he cries with such good grace, that it would be an ill-natured thing to find fault with him '.

In *Le Bon Ménage*, Harlequin, a good husband and still in love with his wife, at one time thinks she is deceiving him, because she has received a note from one Monsieur Léo : this note is not for his wife, but he thinks it is intended for her, whilst she is only the bearer of it. She has just returned home, and he addresses her sharply in his anger :

' . . . You have come from Monsieur Léo's, I am sure, I know it, I saw you, I followed you. Dare to tell me that you have not come from Monsieur Léo's !

ARGENTINE.

' I will not tell a lie ; it is true, I have just spoken with Monsieur Léo ; but . . .

ARLEQUIN, *in despair*.

' Oh ! why did you tell me so ? *I was not sure* '.

There we reach, with Florian, the sublime in the character of the passionate Harlequin. One cannot help being reminded of the famous : *Qui te l'a dit ?* of Racine's Hermione in her fury. This succession of Harlequins taken at different moments and ages forms a series of pretty plays, over which natural, gay and delicate words are abundantly scattered. The author is indeed in his element : later, in *Numa*, in *Gonzalve*, he will aim at some

sort of ideal, he will become stilted ; but here he is Florianet to perfection, as baptized by Voltaire and adopted by the Duc de Penthièvre, it is he in all the truth and all the vivacity of his nature. One smiles to think that this Harlequin, thus transformed by Florian, slightly resembled the Duc de Penthièvre himself. One day when *Le Bon Père* was to be played (that is to say Harlequin again, but a respectable Harlequin in a velvet coat, a vest of cloth of gold and a wig with three lappets), for the prince's name-day, the latter objected to it on grounds of piety ; Florian came forward under Harlequin's mask and regretfully announced to the company, parodying Molière's words in a good sense : ' We did hope to give you to-day the comedy of *Le Bon Père*, but M. le Duc de Penthièvre does not wish it to be played ' ¹. M. Lacroix, one of the men who best knew and best described Florian from every point of view, tells us this anecdote, with many other things which we shall take advantage of.

The *Arlequin-Bon-Père* of Florian is then a sort of Arlequin-Penthièvre, a Harlequin somewhat after Greuze. This virtuous and paternal sensibility, often showing upon every face, even the gay faces, is the stamp of the epoch of Louis XVI.

A singular remark, which characterizes very well the peculiar nature of vocations and instincts, is that later Florian translated *Don Quixote* and abridged it on the pretext of diminishing the blemishes ; but it is often the beauties and the gaieties that he abridges : ' It is the genius that he suppresses, said Marie-Joseph Chénier ; he chills Cervantes' verve ; a broad and frank humour becomes everywhere thin and discreet '. ' To the outpourings of a rich and abundant vein he applies, says M. Joubert, the murmurs and ripplings of a rivulet : little murmurs, little movements, very pleasant no doubt in the case of a narrow thread of water tumbling over the pebbles, but an intolerable and unreal course when attributed to a broad river flowing in full channel over a very fine sand '. We see the mistake, the crime of *high treason* against genius. But this error was natural with Florian, and sprang from his very organization : the man who

¹ Or, *does not wish to be taken off* ; the double meaning cannot be rendered in English. Molière first applied the words to the President Lamoignon, when the latter prohibited *Tartufe*. [Trans.]

takes from Sancho Panza his gaiety and his broad bonhomie is the same who gave sensibility to Harlequin. In a slight degree he *florianizes* everything.

Florian loved Cervantes, but it was not his great qualities, his incomparable and immortal parts that he admired. He preferred to approach him from the side of his pastorals and his tales, and borrowed from him his *Galatée* (1783), whom he treated with freedom, and adapted to the taste of the time, by giving to her a more recent colouring of Gessner: 'I have tried, he wrote to the latter, to dress Miguel Cervantes' *Galatée* in the style in which you dress your Chloes: I have made her sing the songs that you have taught me, and I have decked her hat with flowers pilfered from your shepherdesses'. This pastoral novel, mixed with tender songs, had a great success: all the young women, all the young lovers, raved about it; even the severe critics were softened: 'He is a young man of a happy and natural wit, wrote La Harpe speaking of the author of *Galatée*, who will always be successful if he does not depart from the branch of literature to which his talent calls him'. It is true that, shortly before this, the Chevalier de Florian had addressed to the same M. de La Harpe some enthusiastic lines, after witnessing a performance of *Philoctète*:

Je ne sais pas le grec, mais mon âme est sensible;
Et, pour juger tes vers, il suffit de mon cœur!

Florian combined a little cunning with his sensibility; he was a shepherd, but a bit of a Norman, as many shepherds have been. His passion for the pastoral never at any time prevented his knowing how to succeed and make his way in literature and in society.

Then came the pastoral *Estelle* (1787), shortly after *Numa* (1786). There were as many as three ladies who had reason to believe that *Estelle* was created after their image, that they were both the muse and the model whom the gallantry of the painter had in his mind. The Duchess of Orleans, daughter of the Duc de Penthièvre, was one of these types of *Estelle*; but Florian had also thought of another lady, a young woman of society, to whom he wished to dedicate the novel without naming her. This Dedication has been since printed in the Posthumous

Works, and there were even *three* copies printed at the time (I give the fact for a certainty for the benefit of bibliophiles), which contained that Dedication in place of the Invocation to the *Shepherdesses of my Country*. In order to overcome the modesty of that young woman, who declined the honour of a Dedication, even anonymous, Florian wrote to her: 'All who know you will see that it is you; all those who do not know you will think that it is the Duchess of Orleans. You will both gain by the error'. We see how much less simple and more double-faced Florian was than Némorin. But there is more to come. A charming actress of the Théâtre-Italien and the Théâtre de Favart, whom several of our contemporaries may have seen in her old age and still excellent in the part of *Ma Tante Aurore*, Mme Gonthier, much loved at the time by Florian (and even sometimes a little beaten, they say), thought that she had every right to *Estelle*. Besides he read it to her in manuscript, and it was not her fault if she believed that she was, in most respects, the original of the innocent shepherdess. *Estelle* had at first contained an account of some combat or other: 'Ah! Florian, what are you doing? she exclaimed, *you are staining my roses with blood*'! He took out the combat and put it afterwards into *Gonzalve*. But do you not admire the way in which Florian had his relays of *Estelles*?

I shall not be expected to enter into the full details of this insipid and unreal branch of literature with which the name of Florian is associated. *Estelle* should be read at the age of fourteen and a half. At fifteen, if one is at all precocious, it is already too late. Let us not however speak too ill of it; these Pastorals of Florian are not only a book, they are an age in our life:

'Do you remember *Estelle*? writes Louise to Charles in *Le Presbytère* (that so simple and truly touching novel of M. Topffer). Do you remember how we used to devour those pages, so full of unreality for grown up people, so alive with truth for our imaginations then? Have you forgotten the rapture with which we traversed that pastoral world? Delightful shepherdesses, with complexion so white, in spite of the sun; with dress so neat, in spite of the sheepfold; with language so elegant, without any schooling, without any Lancasters! But, say, Charles, what a pity that there are no more of them! Why is not the world made like that! . . . The book came into my

hands the other day ; shall I confess it ? the pleasure was gone ; it recalled our readings, that was all ; but no more rapture. I almost cried. Is everything that charms us destined to vanish like that ? Oh ! how I should like to have retained those enchanted illusions ; how I should like to feel again the full charm that we felt when reading those childish stories ! No, Charles, I cannot agree with you in abusing childhood. Those were pure, live, delightful pleasures ; they sufficed to adorn the present with the sweetest and most laughing colours. A real, immense loss ! . . . As Florian no longer appealed to me, I went back to *Paul et Virginie*’.

Paul and Virginia indeed naturally succeeds in our young imagination that first too insipid sketch of Florian, and deserves to remain there as the ideal and enduring page. We must not imagine, by the way, that we in our days have discovered the artificial in Florian, and impute to our fathers a worse taste than they had. All the possible criticisms, and the best on the subject, belong to that time, you may be sure of that ; and we can here do no more than re-echo them. Even at Trianon they thought that there was too much of the sheepfold : ‘ When I read *Numa*, said Queen Marie Antoinette to M. de Besenval, I seem to be eating *milk soup*’. M. de Thiard said : ‘ I am very fond of M. de Florian’s Pastorals (sheepfolds), but I should wish there was a *wolf* in them’. Turning M. de Thiard’s words into an epigram, the poet Le Brun said :

To the author of an insipid and tedious Pastoral.

Dans ton beau Roman pastoral,
Avec tes moutons pêle-mêle,
Sur un ton bien doux, bien moral,
Berger, Bergère, Auteur, tout bête.
Puis Bergers, Auteur, Lecteur, Chien,
S’endorment de moutonnerie.
Pour réveiller ta Bergerie,
Oh ! qu’un petit Loup viendrait bien !

And lastly Rivarol, one day meeting Florian with an *anodyne* manuscript half sticking out of his pocket, said to him : ‘ Ah ! sir, if you were not known, you would be robbed’.

About the same time, this redoubtable Rivarol had written, on the occasion of *Numa Pompilius*, so scathing an article, that some of Florian’s friends entreated him not

to publish it. He had the goodness to consent, in spite of all, and the article was not printed till after Florian's death, in *Le Spectateur du Nord*, which appeared at Hamburg (March, 1797). After a judicious criticism of the subject, of the plot and the composition, Rivarol pointed out the monotony of the manner, the absolute want of movement and variety: 'It has been said that purity and elegance were not sufficient in a work of this nature: it is only *created expressions* that bear a writer to posterity. M. de Florian seems to have sumptuary laws in his style and his subject demanded a little luxury'.

That article of Rivarol was written at the moment when Florian was about to enter the Academy, and his friends threw themselves in the way to arrest the blow which might have hurt him. Florian, upon whom everything was smiling, was received into the Academy in 1788, at the age of thirty-three, in rivalry with Vicq-d'Azyr. All kinds of good fortune were coming upon him at once: 'I have obtained in three weeks, he wrote to Boissyd'Anglas (May 31, 1788), a Lieutenant-Colonel's commission, the cross of Saint-Louis, my seat in the Academy, and an Abbey at six leagues from Paris for an aunt of mine, a nun at Arles'. The Duc de Penthièvre and the Duchesse d'Orléans, his daughter, were present at the reception meeting. Florian delivered a Discourse which was a success. He was lavish with eulogies: Buffon was just dead, and Florian said that the life of the immortal writer would be counted *among the Epochs of Nature*, which appeared however a little excessive. He presented himself as having been borne even into the academic sanctuary by Voltaire's friends: 'Thus sometimes valiant captains raise to honours a young soldier, because they have seen him serve as a boy under the tents of their general'. At the same time he paid open tribute to Gessner, who had died shortly before, and whom he proclaimed his master and his friend. Gessner, the Duc de Penthièvre and Voltaire, Florian's name contrived to combine all these shades.

I leave aside the other prose writings that he published, or that appeared after him, and in none of which he surpassed himself. The *Précis historique sur les Maures*, which stands at the head of *Gonzalve de Cordoue*, seems to show that, if he had been able to get away from an unreal branch of literature, he might have been capable of serious

studies. But I wish to devote attention to his *Fables* only, for solely through them, and through his *Plays*, does his name deserve to survive to-day.

His *Fables* appeared in 1792. They exhibit Florian's talent in its perfection, with his charming naturalness, his facile and witty diction, with an indulgent and kindly moral, which excludes however neither mockery nor malice. He had some of that malice in conversation; he excelled in raillery and mimicry: those two faculties are related, M. Arnault has remarked, a good judge in the matter of fable and also of causticity. He describes Florian, by no means as a mild *Abel*, with fair complexion and blue eyes, but with sun-burnt skin and a very unsentimental expression, lighted up by black and sparkling eyes: 'They were not the eyes of a wolf become a shepherd, but perhaps those of the fox; the predominating expression was cunning . . .'. In his early youth Florian had yielded to that taste for mimicry in the part of Harlequin, his true creation. Madly in love with an actress of the Italiens, Mme Gonthier, he had opened out for her. But since then he somewhat lost savour in the vicinity of the Duc de Penthièvre; he had closed up as it were. In his writings we find none of that vivacity of tone which made him say, apropos of a post of gentleman which his friends were soliciting for him: 'I have been a lackey (*that is to say a page*) too long to wish to become a valet de chambre'. For the mild Florian expressed himself thus in conversation; we should not suspect it when reading him. In order to succeed in the world and seize the vein of the moment, Florian had had to choose among his own tastes; he had a touch of the swain and the languishing troubadour, and with pen in hand he had delighted in developing this character to the exclusion of others: his reality, more mixed and more alive, was better than that ideal. In writing *Estelle* and *Galatée*, he was still sincere and no doubt obeyed an inclination of his Languedocian nature; but he suppressed quite a half of it, and a not less essential half, and only showed one side of himself. M. Lacretelle very justly made that observation when he described this real Florian, who had the privilege of inspiring joy everywhere by his witticisms, his tales and his songs: 'He seldom dared to yield to his natural gaiety when writing. It is a gift of

experience and even of deep study to be familiar and laugh with one's readers'.

When younger, he had dared to laugh and cry at the same time in his Harlequinades for Mme Gonthier; when of riper age, and a little emboldened by the beginnings of the Revolution, he dared to be piquant, gay, malicious, and at the same time kindly and moral, in his *Fables*.

The Fable is a natural branch of literature, a form of invention inherent in the mind of man, and it is found in all places and all countries. Some have attempted to trace it to an Eastern origin, and behold! we find it in the Middle Ages coming from the north in that admirable *Roman de Renart*, which is quite an epopee. The Fable is found everywhere, and if it were forgotten it would be reinvented in every age. With us La Fontaine has raised it to such a height, has so diversified and enlarged it, that he seemed bound to discourage all those who should be tempted to become his successors. That has not been the case however. Fables have still continued to be written after him, often good, correct and agreeable fables; La Motte himself, the Duc de Nivernais, the Abbé Aubert, M. Arnault; and so we come to our near contemporaries, M. de Stassart, M. Viennet, so much relished and applauded for his verve. In all of them we might find some animated, ingenious, piquant fables, fulfilling all the conditions proper to that little poem. With regard to La Fontaine, who is the god as it were or the Homer of the kind, I may say that he is so great and so wonderful in fable only because he often oversteps the bounds and wanders outside of its sphere. That could be easily proved in a detailed study of La Fontaine: we should see him, in his first manner, confining himself to the Fable properly so-called, and attaining perfection in it at the end of his first book, in the *Oak and the Reed*; but he is soon a master, and he plays with his subject; he enlarges his frame, he steps outside of it, and forgets it. La Motte has tried to prove, with all sorts of good reasons, that the fable of the *Two Pigeons* sins against *unity*, 'that we do not quite know what is the prevailing idea in this picture, whether the dangers of travelling, or the anxiety of friendship, or the pleasure of the return after a long absence'. These two Pigeons, besides, who at first are only two *brothers* or two friends, turn out in the end to be two *lovers*. But

what care I? the story is charming; it captivates and enchants me, and the moment when the poet steps outside of the frame enchants me still more and makes me forget everything." Read the *Dream of an Inhabitant of Mogol*; there we find the same thing: the story is unimportant; it connects itself by the lightest of threads with reflection, with the final revery in which the poet loses himself. He has uttered the word *solitude*, and that word, arousing quite a succession of thoughts, carries him away into a sweet enthusiasm which gains possession of us with him. Add to that freedom in La Fontaine and to that fancifulness of composition a perpetual poetry of details, and moments of elevation and grandeur, whenever the occasion offers itself, and the simplest of circumstances besides. We must not expect anything of the kind in his successors, in Florian any more than in the others, though one is generally agreed in giving him the second place. . . . But, between this second place and the first, we must not even try to measure the distance.

Florian's *Fables* are well composed, they show an ingenious and easy combination; the subject is almost always in perfect agreement with the moral, and exactly proportioned to it. And at the same time we do not, as in the case of La Motte, perceive the artificial arrangement, nor that kind of spirit which, starting from an abstract idea, needs to remind itself that it must be figurative, smiling, familiar, and even naïve. The qualities of the fabulist are natural to Florian: he has fertility of invention, and images occur to him without any effort. He delights in animals in real life; he too lives with them in his own way:

Vous connaissez ce quai nommé de la Ferraille,
Où l'on vend des oiseaux, des hommes et des fleurs :
A mes Fables souvent c'est là que je travaille. . . .

We also see him residing at the town mansion of the Toulouse family, with his library quite close to an aviary inhabited by a multitude of birds, live subjects for his *Fables*. Shall we point out a few of the best, the excellent ones: *The Blind man and the Paralytic*; *The Cricket*; *The Owl, the Cat, the Gosling and the Rat*; *The Pasha and the Dervish*; *The Monkey exhibiting a Magic Lantern*; *The Rabbit and the Teal*? In this last fable, in which there is a reminiscence

of *The Two Pigeons*, Florian has found a double and ingenious combination, according to which the two friends, by turns in danger, and pursued by the same hunter, succour and save each other. At the beginning there is a breath of freshness and poetry in the landscape, which is rare even in Florian :

Le terrier du Lapin était sur la lisière
D'un parc bordé d'une rivière.
Soir et matin, nos bons amis,
Profitant de ce voisinage,
Tantôt au bord de l'eau, tantôt sous le feuillage,
L'un chez l'autre étaient réunis.

Do you not observe, however, at the end of the last line, the prose-rhymer already beginning to appear again ? The supreme invention, the idea of the Teal swimming and towing the Rabbit seated on a raft purposely built to enable him to cross the river, is expressed in an entirely graceful and picturesque manner :

Ah ! si tu pouvais passer l'eau !
Pourqu'i pas ? attends-moi. . . . La Sarcelle le quitte,
Et revient trainant un vieux nid
Laisse par les canards ; elle l'emplit bien vite
De feuilles de roseau, les presse, les unit
Des pieds, du bec, en forme un batelet capable
De supporter un lourd fardeau ;
Puis elle attache à ce vaisseau
Un brin de jonc qui servira de câble.
Cela fait, et le bâtiment
Mis à l'eau, le Lapin entre tout doucement
Dans le léger esquif, s'assied sur son derrière,
Tandis que devant lui la Sarcelle nageant
Tire le brin de jonc, et s'en va dirigeant
Cette nef à son cœur si chère.

In *The Ploughman of Castille*, which is so to say his *Peasant of the Danube*, Florian has found a few powerful and robust tones to describe the dress and appearance of that rustic and loyal subject. We might note a few of these features elsewhere, though they are much too rare in Florian. It is the higher poetry that he lacks, that poetry that is never out of place, flashes of which so frequently cross and broaden La Fontaine's horizon. In his fable of *Hercules in Heaven*, Florian begins with these prosaic lines :

Lorsque le fils d'Alcmène, après ses longs travaux,
Fut reçu dans le Ciel, tous les Dieux s'empressèrent
De venir au-devant de ce fameux héros. . . .

Truly, La Fontaine, having to describe Hercules carried off from his pile to Olympus, and seating himself *all aflame among the Gods*, would have done it differently. Where wit and grace are able to make up for poetry, where it suffices to tell the story well and to enliven it by a pleasing touch, Florian does admirably, as when, in the quarrel between the Owl, the Cat and the Gosling, he describes the Rat who is acting as arbitrator,

Rat savant qui rongait des thèmes dans sa hutte !

La Fontaine could not have said it better.

We find in Florian too a certain number of fables of a more concise and vigorous kind than we should expect in him : *The Parrot* ; *The Peacock*, *the two Goslings and the Diver* ; *The Caterpillar*, which they say was composed with an eye upon Mme de Genlis. We might quote a fable of his that is smart and brief as an epigram.

Concluding his *Fables* at a period when the old French society was upheaved and about to perish, Florian gave expression to a sincere wish, a real desire to be forgotten ; he wished for secret peace, the peace of the heart, a studious shelter,

Le travail qui sait éloigner
Tous les fléaux de notre vie ;
Assez de bien pour en donner,
Et pas assez pour faire envie.

But these modest wishes, which the poet and sage have cherished at all times, were then the most ambitious of chimeras. Florian's existence, hitherto so happy, was destined to receive a cruel blow, above all to experience terror and dismay. M. Lacrosette, in his *Dix Années d'Épreuves*, has touched on more than one point that testifies to the terror which Florian felt, and of the consequent alteration in his nature, till then so sociable and so expansive. But here is a more pleasing and more touching detail, which is more like him. Florian was in the habit of spending, every summer, a few weeks of an ever fresh charm at the magnificent and delightful residence of Mme

de La Briche, sister-in-law of Mme de Houdetot and mother-in-law of Comte Molé, whom we ourselves had the honour of still seeing there in her extreme old age. He went to that handsome and cheerful château of the Marais, which nobody can forget who ever visited it, and there he superintended the performance of some of his plays. As author, actor and stage-manager, he was the soul of the amusements of that company. Now, in the first fortnight of September, 1793, in this privileged château, in the midst of its pleasant and fresh valley, there were gathered together a score of persons of all ages, men, women, all more or less threatened, who, in spite of all those ideas of ruin, of imprisonment and even death, by which all were surrounded, tried to forget the storm and to enjoy in company those last fine days. The sky had never been more purely serene, more unchangeable. There prevailed, as I have been told by a reliable witness, a sort of exhilaration, of happiness mingled with a tender charm, a gaiety sometimes forced but always keen. Not a moment was given over to memories; they did not part company, for fear of meeting again with a cloud on their brow. However, in the midst of these pleasures, Florian, who was the life and soul of them, and who redoubled and communicated to the others his gay sallies, would sometimes stop dreamily, and say: 'Take my word for it, we shall pay dearly for these happy days!' He added that, if he died, he would like to be interred in that lovely garden, and he even pointed out the spot. Somebody jestingly composed an epitaph for him at the time; a year later it was too well verified. Arrested in his turn, he died, as is well known, shortly after his leaving prison, in September, 1794. His constitution, which was delicate and made for happiness, was not equal to the shock of so many emotions. He was only thirty-nine years of age.

One of the books of his *Fables* ended with these words, which might be more vigorous in expression, but which are full of feeling and philosophy, and which bear the title *Le Voyage* :

Partir avant le jour, à tâtons, sans voir goutte,
Sans songer seulement à demander sa route,
Aller de chute en chute, et, se traînant ainsi,
Faire un tiers du chemin jusqu'à près de midi;

Voir sur sa tête alors s'amasser les nuages,
Dans un sable mouvant précipiter ses pas,
Courir, en essuyant orages sur orages,
Vers un but incertain, où l'on n'arrive pas ;
Détrompé, vers le soir, chercher une retraite,
Arriver haletant, se coucher, s'endormir,
On appelle cela naître, vivre et mourir :
La volonté de Dieu soit faite !

That is the true epitaph for Florian, that happy man, that facile and smiling talent, whose every wish was granted in this world and this life, but who could not avoid the inevitable grief, the ancient grief of Job, which is incessantly renewed on earth, and which drowned his whole heart in a single drop of bitterness.

ÉTIENNE PASQUIER ¹

Monday, January 6, 1851.

ÉTIENNE PASQUIER has formed, in recent years, the subject of new and profound studies. The present Chancellor Pasquier, having recovered an unpublished manuscript of his ancestor, containing explanations and lectures given by Étienne Pasquier to his grandsons on Roman Law, considered from the point of view of its relations to our ancient French Customs, desired to give the public the benefit of them, and entrusted the editing and publication of it to M. Giraud, who has long been an acknowledged master in these matters. This publication, which has a serious interest even for those who are not specially occupied with the Law, was accompanied by a very fine biographical and historical work on Étienne Pasquier by M. Giraud, and by a few pages, written with as much elevation as judgment, by the Chancellor. Since then, a distinguished professor of the University, M. Léon Feugère, undertook to prepare for the publishing firm of Didot a portable edition of the *Select Works* of Pasquier, and has compressed into two 18mo volumes an excellent selection from the two folio volumes of his author. He added a biographical, literary and grammatical work, written with much care, which henceforth permits us to class the learned friend of Montaigne among the number of authors that anybody may directly approach and follow with intelligence. We will avail ourselves of these labours to give some account of the worthy and scholarly man who forms the subject of them.

Étienne Pasquier is not one of those original writers who are in advance of their times, and who make their mother-tongue do wonders. Such writers are rare in all periods, and in the sixteenth century I know of only two who can

¹ *Interpretation of the Institutes of Justinian, an unpublished work, 1847.—Select Works, 1849.*

be rightly acclaimed by this brilliant title, Rabelais and Montaigne. For, with regard to the amiable translator Amyot, only through a little indulgence has he been ordinarily associated with those two original authors; and as to Calvin, who certainly contributed his share towards forming the language to purposes of discussion, towards compressing, tempering and consolidating the exact chain of reasoning in speech, this, though a notable merit, does not suffice to raise him above the level of merely good writers: he did not win a place among the great ones. But, outside of these quite individual geniuses, Rabelais and Montaigne, the sixteenth century can show a number of powerful intellects of the highest quality, earnest and energetic men, who employed sanely and courageously the resources of the language at this period of confusion and struggle, and who, applying it according to their different needs, set upon it the impress not so much of their own genius as that of the party and class to which they belonged. These writers, whether soldiers or magistrates, whilst representing themselves individually, also represent and typify for us the men of their side, their gown or their camp. In Montluc, for example, we see a heroic military leader, earnest and indefatigable, full of a fanatic zeal for his God and his King, a crusader of the sixteenth century. In d'Aubigné we see another captain, intrepid, eager and obstinate, not less of a Gascon than the other, equally attached to his God but a little severe on his King; faithful, but conditionally so, not, like Montluc, a Royalist at any price; more feudal, more communal, who died a Republican at Geneva. Side by side with these rude and virile figures there appears a woman, Queen Margaret, sister of the Valois, who in her writings discloses a glimpse of an elegant, shrewd, refined, exquisite, perfidious personality, a type not uncommon in this family, and this retinue of Catherine de Médicis. D'Aubigné, an obstinate Calvinist; Montluc, a cruel Catholic, paint for us the two camps; Queen Margaret paints the Court. But, between the three, who will present the party of moderate, peaceful, honest men, the educated and sound higher middle-class, who are neither fanatic nor corrupt? who will express the opinions prevailing in the Order of Advocates, so compact at that time and clothed as it were in its first integrity, the universal spirit of the judicial body of the time, so

stable, courageous and heroic? L'Hôpital, De Thou, Pithou, these are assuredly great names, each of which individually might serve as an example to prove our point; but in French, and having regard to present-day readers, none represents them more to the life in his writings, none displays and sums them up more conveniently and faithfully than Etienne Pasquier; he presents a life in the sixteenth century in all its completeness, and he has expressed this life in works, serious and half familiar, in Letters written not in Latin, but in the French of his day, and with an evident intention of instructing posterity. Let us then take a look at an advocate and judge of the sixteenth century; let us obtain some idea of such a life; that will afford us comfort and relief in the midst of so many weaknesses which affect the studies, characters and manners of our days.

Etienne Pasquier, born at Paris in 1529, of a family of honorable standing, but which he was to be the first to render illustrious, was, by reason of the date of his birth, in a position to profit by all the learning and knowledge which belong to the sixteenth century. When he was born, the first clearing had been made, and it only remained to reap and gather. He studied Law in Paris, under Hotoman and Balduin, in 1546, and at Toulouse under the great Cujas, in 1547. These celebrated masters were at the beginning of their career, and he enjoyed, if we may say so, this earnest teaching in all its novelty and freshness. He then travelled to Italy, and sat under the most renowned professors of Law of the time at Pavia and Bologna. On his return he appeared at the Parisian Bar as an advocate (1549), and at the same time, to occupy his leisure hours, devoted himself to poetry and literary composition; this double character of lawyer and man of letters distinguished this generation of advocates, and Pasquier among his fellows: 'When I arrived at the Palais (de Justice), he says, finding nobody to employ me, and not being born to be idle, I began to write books, but books in conformity with my age, and the honest liberty that I bore on my brow: these were Dialogues of Love. . . .'

The gallant and amorous Dialogues, the Sonnets which Etienne Pasquier published in these youthful years, and which he looked back upon with a smile of indulgence in his old age, display nothing beyond wit, facility and an

ingenious subtlety, and we find in them no original touch which could rank the author among the true poets. But what is remarkable, and constitutes in some sort the judicious portion of these trifling compositions, is that idea, which he had in common with the best and most courageous minds of that second generation of the sixteenth century, that, born a Frenchman, he ought to write *in French*. He, who is so well versed in Latin and Greek letters, is certainly not of opinion that *Greek and Latin should be exterminated among us*, but he thinks that one should make use of both, according to the occasion, without being reduced and confined to them; that one should draw upon them to enrich our vulgar language, which is itself already so well endowed. From the very first Pasquier's good sense saved him from that excess which had accompanied the triumph of the Renaissance, and which made the men of learning disdain to employ any language but that of the ancient Romans: 'The dignities of our France, the military weapons, the practical terms, in short half the things we employ at the present day, are changed and have nothing in common with the language of Rome. And in this change, to attempt to set forth in Latin what never was Latin, is, whilst wishing to appear learned, to be not well-advised'. So, for his part, he is content to pay his tribute of politeness and courtesy in the fashion of the time with a few Latin epigrams; but the majority of his lighter poems, as well as his serious works, he will compose in French; he will avoid the eccentricity of persevering in his Latinity, as we see the illustrious De Thou doing, which has impaired instead of increasing the success of the latter's great History. Pasquier writes in French his learned and useful *Researches on France*; he publishes in French his *Letters*, the first collection of the kind that ever appeared in our language, which are quite a mirror of the events, the manners, customs and opinions of his time, as of the life of the author himself.

Until the year 1564, when Pasquier, at the age of thirty-five, finds himself suddenly borne to the pinnacle of his profession of barrister, in consequence of his having been chosen by the University in their great law-suit against the Jesuits; before this to him momentous epoch, he lives a life of labour and frequents society, the society of the University and the Law Courts, possessing and cultivating

many friendships, pleading honourably and with a success based on the esteem in which he is held, married since 1557 to a grateful client whose suit he has been the means of winning. His *Letters*, to which I shall confine myself particularly in this paper, give a true picture of him at his different ages, in the variety of his tastes and the diversified solidity of his studies. A characteristic which is essential to him, and which one soon discovers as forming the basis of his merit, is an excellent judgment, a correct and well-balanced appreciation of things, to whatever direction he turns his vision. Is it a question of judging his fellows and friends the poets, Ronsard and the rest? he is the first to warn them that they are on the wrong track, if they do not take care; that what was at first a noble flight and a generous enterprise on the part of some, becomes for the crowd of disciples an imitation mania; that there is quite a swarm of them; that everything quickly becomes a fashion in France, and that this *aping* mania runs riot especially in matters of the intellect. He warns Ronsard, as early as 1555, not to yield, as he does, to that easy propensity, which means destruction to everything, not to court and flatter his disciples, not in short to allow a sublime work to degenerate into an uproar and the ovation of a coterie. I am here lightly translating Pasquier, but without altering him. Is it a question of marriage? we find the same excellent judgment in Pasquier's manner of speaking of marriage before he contracted his own. He has been in favour of marriage from his youth; he treats the matter in rather a gay spirit, and in a tone at times a little crude, but with wisdom and chastity at bottom. There is no woman, he thinks, be she ever so beautiful, but she becomes indifferent to a man after a year of possession, nor is there any plainness in moderation which does not become tolerable in course of time: the essential, according to him, lies in their way of life, in their purity and their gentleness. 'Just as an artisan never blends together two hard metals', so he will not allow that two characters joined together should be of the highest temper and too self-willed; one of the two should yield to the other on some points. For his own part, without neglecting the question of worldly goods, he will, before marrying, inquire especially into conduct. So, in all things, we see that he follows a middle and safe

course. It is his instinct, and he makes it his express rule of conduct : ' I have resolved, he says, in all the conduct of my life, to fly *neither too high nor too low* '.

One of his Letters (the 12th of Book II) appears to contain his whole literary theory, the ideal of language as he desires it, and he conforms to it in the same spirit of right and middle-course reason. Pasquier thinks, as we have said, in opposition to many of his contemporaries, that one should write *in French* ; but where is one to find the source of this French in its natural purity ? Some are of opinion that the best speech is heard at the Court of the Kings, that there the true French is to be learned ; Pasquier denies it *flatly*. He finds the language spoken there too soft and effeminate. Is this school of good language then to be sought at the Court of the Palais and in Parliament ? Not any more than at the other Court. The barristers there speak without sufficient choice, and the man who tries to speak better than his fellows is taxed by the others with affectation and studied elegance. Where then is one to find the pure source ? ' I am of opinion, says Pasquier, that this purity is not restricted to any time or place, but *scattered over the whole of France* '. It is necessary therefore in some sort to select the good language, to compound and gather it from more than one place, without neglecting what may be borrowed, as one goes along, from the ancient languages. To this mixed labour he compares the natural process of digestion ; he dwells however too much upon certain details of this laborious process. In a word, in all he says on this subject, Pasquier shows good sense, but he has not yet found good taste. Taste is the last thing to appear in France ; but when it does appear, it is already late, and good sense, which is so well adapted to fortify and support it, is already weakened. Entire good sense and true taste have never existed together in France except during a very short period of the literature and language.

Pasquier desires a language which is indeed fundamentally French, but very broad and rich in acquisitions and appendages. In this as in everything he follows his own line, and gives proof of a broad practical sense. He advises having recourse to the old authors and deriving nourishment from them, in order to enrich the language by art and science, but without becoming *antiquarian* ;

that is an affectation ' which should be avoided, he says, like a shoal or reef in the open sea '. He thinks there is profit in listening to the members of different professions, soldiers, huntsmen, financiers, even simple potty artisans. Every profession, indeed, produces in its own manner good intellects who find, in the subject they habitually have in hand, happy expressions, *bold* and natural terms, by which a good writer may afterwards profit, but which he would never have thought of alone. Pasquier quotes examples of good phrases for which he was indebted to men of the people. One of these, to express the idea that he was ' quick and lively at his work ', added that he was *franc au trait* (frank in pulling) : ' a metaphor, says Pasquier, derived from good horses in harness ; which I should never have thought of, not having been a carter ; *a village clown taught me the phrase* '. We see that Pasquier would do almost as Malherbe advised, who was wont to refer those who questioned him about language to the *porters of the Port-au-Foin*. But Pasquier did not refer to them for the complete schooling ; and, in general, the language as he conceives and designs it, is broader and more varied than that which Malherbe afterwards made prevalent.

When he advises imitation and translation of the Ancients Pasquier recommends not a slavish translation, but to find the equivalent in French of a word or phrase, to call up, if possible, from our own stock, words or phrases suggested by them. He himself was generally faithful to these counsels when writing. No doubt he has faults, occasional conceits or a play on words, comparisons too far-fetched, too frequently recurring reminiscences of Cæsar, Pompey and Scipio, one-sided discussions, which recall the Declamations of the Ancients. His progress is sometimes embarrassed and impeded as it were by too much erudition ; he is not so animated and *short-coated* as Montaigne, or even as the clever though unlearned Philippe de Commynes. His style is *long-robed*, even in his *Letters*, when he is not aiming at pomposity ; but every now and then, he redeems these real defects, these lengthy phrases, by the use of a happy expression which would do credit to Montaigne ; to his habitual gravity, to the accuracy and honesty of his thoughts he adds a charm, which is suggestive of a poet writing prose. This remnant of the poet in him, which was inadequate to produce pure poetry, returns at the

right moment to enliven and, as it were, to scatter flowers over his serious pages. In short, at his best Pasquier offers us the language of the sixteenth century in its fairest *every-day dress*. In the chain of tradition, he forms a middle term, a solid link between the good writers of the fifteenth century, such as Alain Chartier, and the good writers of the seventeenth, as Patru or Bourdaloue.

And as a corrective to the several defects that I have just pointed out in this estimable prose-writer, can one imagine a more charming, more vivacious and exuberant letter, than that which he writes to one of his friends on the occasion of the birth of his son! He is almost carried away by the intoxication of his new parental state; this time his style is buoyed up and appears to leap: '*Puer nobis natus est*, he exclaims in the words of the Christmas Mass. It delights me to begin this letter with a passage from the Church, in imitation of our old advocates in their important pleadings. . . . I am *the richer by a child*, and that in the way desired by an ancient philosopher, that is to say, by a male and not a girl; I should say a Parisian and not a barbarian, were it not that this name sounds ill in the ears of all. . . .' And he goes on to tell how, in jest and with a remnant of the scholar's superstition, he attempted to draw this son's horoscope, by opening at random some book in his library. It was Ovid that he happened to lay hands on, and read in two or three places; and he interprets the oracle gaily, concluding from one of the passages that, in the matter of virtue and the management of fortune one should follow, neither the too dissolute sect of the Epicureans, nor the too austere and destitute disciples of the Stoics or Cynics, but that here below we should conform, to the best of our power, to the maxim of Aristotle, that *sage worldling*, who bids us *to enjoy virtue in the affluence of worldly goods*: 'That is how I, a little father, he adds, have commenced to coddle my child'.

Pasquier's *Letters*, which he himself began to publish in ten books (1586), and which after him have been completed to the number of twenty-two books, are very instructive reading, and increase in interest as one becomes absorbed in them, presenting a complete picture of himself, his society and his epoch. Side by side with a letter of importance he will designedly insert an insignificant

note, the form and expression of which have been carefully studied. In this respect he is the fore-runner of (Guez de) Balzac and the Chevalier de Méré, of that ingenious and precise school which put the language through the last year of its rhetoric course: the first year of this course begins perceptibly with Pasquier. But soon, in the course of time and events, the subjects become more serious: from a certain moment, the whole of the history and politics of his time are passed in review, and we are spectators with him, that is to say, through the eyes of a discerning and well-informed witness, placed at the best point of view, neither too near the Court nor too distant, who does not pique himself on speaking like a statesman, but who judges and feels the things concerning his nation with the heart and intelligence of the higher *bourgeoisie*, then so upright and patriotic, who might be called the very heart of France. These *Letters* are truly one of the most essential documents to be placed by the side of the *Memoirs* of the time.

The political portion of Pasquier's *Letters* begins with the Fourth Book; we may there trace the origin of the troubles (1560), the invasion, the progress, the successive intermissions and paroxysms of that religious and civil fever. Pasquier has no prejudices to start with; he is a good Catholic, but without any fanaticism; he is opposed to the introduction of the public worship of the Protestants, but he does not declare himself forcibly against them until he sees the Reformation, emboldened by edicts of pacification and tolerance, raising its head and becoming aggressive in its turn. Among all those princes and lords who, in divers directions, speak of nothing but the religion of God, the service of the King, and the love of country, 'I know of not a single one, he says, who is not, under these fine pretences, totally and thoroughly ruining the kingdom. . . . It would be impossible to tell you how many barbarous cruelties are committed on both sides: where the Huguenot is master, he destroys all the images, demolishes the tombs and sepulchres. . . . To counterbalance this, the Catholic kills, murders, drowns all he knows to belong to that sect; and *the rivers are overflowing with them.* . . .' As to the leaders, though they pretend not to approve of such excesses, Pasquier remarks that, by connivance and dissimulation,

they overlook them in those of their own side. He says, establishing degrees in evil and public calamities : ' Peace is better than war ; the war that is waged against the stranger-enemy is much more tolerable than the other which is carried on between citizen and citizen : but, among civil wars, none is so bitter, none brings so many evils after it, than that which is undertaken for Religion. . . . *There are two great camps in France. . . .* ' In many a passage he comes back to this idea that, of all wars, there is none worse than that waged under the cloak of Religion. Explaining the attempts at conciliation made by the Chancellor de l'Hôpital, he deems them honourable, but unavailing and chimerical : ' They speak of nothing but war ; every man is furbishing his harness. M. the Chancellor is saddened at the thought : all the others take a delight in it (1561) ' . He sighs over this almost universal vertigo ; he feels that the people and the middle-class have nothing to gain in these quarrels of ambitious men, who take advantage of the passions and the beliefs of all, to attain their own ends, and to supplant one another : ' If I were permitted to judge by events, he exclaims, I should say to you that this is the commencement of a tragedy, which will be played in our midst, at our expense ; and God grant that it may affect our purses only ' ! Of the principal chiefs and authors of these evils he speaks however with moderation and a full knowledge of the cause : never have Coligny and the Guises been better judged and, with their virtues and vices, weighed in the balance with a more impartial equity. When the danger grows and it becomes necessary for honest men to declare themselves, Pasquier does not hesitate, in spite of everything ; he is at his post, and counsels others to be at theirs. Pibrac, a King's advocate, who is absent from Paris in 1567, and sheltered in a safe place, asks his advice whether he should return to Paris, and expose himself to the risks of a journey. Pasquier replies that if one had a free choice, and were at the beginning of one's career, it would be one's duty in this case to follow the precept of the physician during the plague : *Depart soon, go far, and return late* : ' But since each of us has passed beyond the middle age of life, since you, seventeen or eighteen years ago, were called to the finest offices of our profession, *it seems to me that we must resolve to live and die like good citizens with our State* ' . The

advice he gave to Pibrac he followed himself : we see him in the second half of his career, after having passed from the Bar into the ranks of the higher judges, and been appointed Advocate-General in the Court of Accounts (Audit-Office) in 1585, fulfilling all the duties of this office, including exile, and invariably undergoing all the vicissitudes of fortune which, during the League, tossed about the remnants of the Parliament and the Sovereign Courts of France. He was in every respect worthy to belong to that Body of Magistrates of which M. Giraud is able to say with so much reason, that *the sixteenth century was the heroic age of their history*, and which had for its august leader the great and brave Achille de Harlay.

Pasquier's political theory may be inferred from his life and his various writings ; it is purely and simply that of the Parliamentarians. Pasquier did not favour the States-General ; from the beginning he augured no good from the Assembly held at Orleans (1560) : ' It is an old folly which is prevalent in the minds of the wisest Frenchmen, that there is nothing which will solace the people as much as these Assemblies : on the contrary, there is nothing which will procure them so much injury, for an infinity of reasons '. And he was not very much mistaken at that time, considering the constrained conditions to which the Third Estate were subjected in those Assemblies. Pasquier considered that, however good the ordinances which might be carried through, they were only *fine tapestries which served the purpose of parade in the eyes of posterity*, but that the object of the game was to induce the plebeian delegates by flattery to promise a tax, which was afterwards exacted from them in all rigour. The States-General thus put aside, the ancient monarchy was more surely defined, to Pasquier's liking, as a monarchy which was tempered, through its own action, by *that great and perpetual Council of France*, called Parliament. Was it the monarch who had expressly granted this primary authority to his Parliament ? Or was it the old Parliaments themselves which, during the Kings' minorities, had gradually established this authority, afterwards consented to and ratified by the monarchs ? Pasquier did not urge these primary questions too far ; but to him, in its splendour and actual plenitude, Parliament represented *the Majesty of the Crown which resides in Justice*, and does not die. French

Royalty, in this respect amiable and easy-going among royalties, had willingly and voluntarily reduced its absolute power *under the civility of the Law*. The Parliament borrowed from the Kings themselves a sort of gracious right to warn and to resist them. Such is, in an abridged form, the political theory of Pasquier and that of the Parliamentarians, a theory more justified by fact than by logic, and which had its living practice in the sixteenth century.

According to this theory, the resistance of Parliament to the will of kings did not exclude fidelity, and was, on the contrary, rather the loftiest and most devoted expression of it. Pasquier took pleasure in recording in his writings several examples of it, where authority and submission are in touching harmony with greatness. One day, Louis XI, who did not much like contradiction, sent to his Parliament a certain ordinance to be registered, which, not being just, met with several refusals. The King was carried away by his anger so far as to say that, if these gentlemen refused a last time, he would have them *all put to death*. But see now, "the King being at the Louvre, the whole Parliament in their red robes proceed towards him, who, infinitely astonished at this new spectacle in unseasonable time and place, asks of them what it is they demand. *Death*, Sire (replied the Seigneur de La Vacquerie, the First President, as mouthpiece of the whole company); the death which you have been pleased to ordain, as that which we are resolved to choose rather than pass your edict against our consciences'. Pasquier, who hands down this noble tradition, adds: 'I believe this story to be most true, *because I wish it so*, . . . and may it be imprinted on the heart of every sovereign Court'. Such were the great examples in which they delighted in those days at the Palais, and which, as M. Giraud has said excellently well, were the *cherished Legends of the men of the Robe*. Pasquier imitated, in his degree, these fine examples of virtuous and *jeal* liberty. Hardly had he been invested, by the confidence of Henry IV, with the office of King's Advocate General in the Court of Accounts, when he availed himself of his new authority to oppose the registration of a certain edict which he thought iniquitous; and, as it happened that a great Princess, whom he saw shortly

after, told him of the King's displeasure, who was previously so well-disposed towards him, Pasquier replied, recalling his former gallant courtesy and the poetry of his younger days to modify the severity of his proceeding, that these were only disagreements and quarrels between a lover and his mistress; that 'the issue of this would be like the case of a *lover*, who, having been dismissed by his *lady*, goes away very ill-pleased, but who, shortly after coming to himself, respects and honours her more than ever' and that the King would likewise regard him with a more favourable eye than before. In this lofty spirit of devotion Pasquier did not fear to oppose Henry IV himself by refusing to register an edict which would have dismembered the Court of Accounts; this was during the sojourn of the Parliament at Tours, that is to say, whilst the loyal magistrates were sharing the varying fortunes of the Béarnais and his exile from Paris. Do you not admire this resistance, respectful even in its entire fidelity? The same man who shortly after writes an effusive and enthusiastic letter on the victory of Ivry, a letter which is the triumphal bulletin as it were, the cry of joy of the French people, this man regards it as his strict duty as King's Advocate in a sovereign Court, to warn his master, to resolutely oppose his will, at the risk of his displeasure. An incomplete, inconsistent theory, if you will, which cannot hold out against exact reasoning, but which clothes itself with grandeur and religion in history, since it has so many fine names to support it, from the First President de La Vacquerie to M. de Malesherbes.

The leader and the hero of this august Body of Magistrates in the sixteenth century, the First President Achille de Harlay, said to the Duke of Guise, who came to see him on the day after *The Barricades*, and found him peacefully walking in his garden: 'It is a great pity when the Man drives away the Master; for the rest, my soul is God's, my heart is my King's, and my body is in the hands of the wicked: let them do with it what they please!' Thus did they speak of Royalty, in peril and face to face with the enemy, who resisted Royalty itself face to face. But that is the Ideal, and the Ideal is realized here below only for an instant at the most. Truly, if anything in France was capable of counterbalancing

the impetuosity and impatience proper to the nation, to the nobility as well as to the people, of creating in good season that *respect of the Law*, which is a sort of public sense which we lack and which is abolished in us, it was this upright body, holding a *magisterial middle place*, this body of still-believing politicians, good Christians and Catholics without being Ultramontane, loyal and fervent Royalists, without being courtiers or slaves. There was in it an organic principle which seemed calculated to give life and stability to a middle-class, to that class which we have seen many times since then trying to form and reform itself under different names, but which was unable to regain any solidity, nor an elevated morality. This class, which had its first day of power and triumph under Henry IV, found its religion in the soul of the French magistracy in the sixteenth century. But in the seventeenth all was ruined. Troublesome minorities were followed by absolute, almost despotic governments. The virtue, gravity and fidelity of Parliament perished especially during the Fronde. In spite of the great name of Mathieu Molé, the hitherto inviolable majesty of this body was obscured. Louis XIV enslaved the Parliament, Louis XV feared it: 'You know not what they do and what they think, he said to his intimates, *it is an Assembly of Republicans*. . . .' At this time, the theory in question, which had need of a mutual condescension, confidence and faith, this theory into which, as we have seen, there entered I know not what Platonic illusion, was totally lost sight of; after which there remained only great and fine names which to the end and on the scaffold testified to their generous origin.

I have been able to choose, cursorily, only a few points in Pasquier's career, in that existence which was so eventful and might be studied from so many different aspects. If we were telling the story of his life (as his last biographers have recently done so well), we should speak in detail of his pleading for the University against the Jesuits, and of the long war in which this first act involved both him and his posterity. If we desired to amuse, we should recall the story of that famous *Flea*, which one day during the holding of the Great-Days at Poitiers (1579), Pasquier, calling upon Mademoiselle Des Roches, saw on the bosom of that fair lady, and which furnished

matter for quite a volume of more or less anacreontic poems in Greek, Latin and French ; recreation and sport for grave senators ! Nor should we forget those famous *Ordnances* of Love, which evidently found no place in the Complete Works of Pasquier, and which are the last Saturnalia, as it were, of an honest man's sportiveness in the sixteenth century. The long labours and the years of trial, several domestic bereavements in the bosom of his large family, had by no means dulled Pasquier's wit nor soured his disposition. After a career of thirty-six years as a pleading barrister, and another nineteen as King's Advocate, he resigned all his public offices and went into retirement at the age of seventy-five (1604). There he regained his cheerfulness, and his love for writing verses, Latin or French epigrams, as a diversion among his more serious studies. An admirable letter of his, which depicts him in the serenity of his final rejuvenation, is that which he wrote to Achille de Harlay, also retired from public office, on the sweets of retirement and the charms of peaceful and varied studies, henceforth confined to the interior of the work-room, which he hopes that he will not again leave : ' On one side I have my books, my pen and my thoughts ; on the other a good fire such as Martial might have wished for, when among human felicities he put these two words : *focus perennis*. Thus coddling both mind and body . . . , etc." And he continues this pleasing and smiling description in a lively style which suggests both that of Amyot and Montaigne. Achille de Harlay would send him in return a sonnet, not quite equal to his sublime words to the Duke of Guise. But who would not smile with a tender emotion to see the last pure joys of these great innocent souls ?

It was in the calm of these last days that Pasquier, then over eighty, dictated, for the use of two of his grandsons, the lectures on law which M. Giraud has given us the means of appreciating. Taking for his text and starting-point the Institutes of Justinian, the scholarly old man shows himself eager to seize all the analogies or even the contradictions which may be met with between Ancient Roman Law and our old Customary Law ; he illuminates and explains one by the other, by the means of a continuous comparison, to which his erudition adds ornament and lustre, and which does not lack a certain

degree of charm. Here again we find him faithful to his spirit of keeping a middle course of practical and elevated wisdom. In law as in all things Pasquier follows this high road of reason, which leads to no extreme. He belongs to the Roman Renaissance, with energy but with moderation. In opposition to those who would make an excessive use of a foreign authority in France, he vigorously upholds all that appertains to a *true and native* National Law; just as in opposition to those who, through another superstition, go too far in advocating Custom, he delights in exalting the decisions of Ancient Jurisprudence. In a word he stands mid-way between the pure *Romanists* and the *Customary School*, subordinating all to the control of *common sense*, which in the end is the supreme rule. Enough has been said to show that in law as in religion, as in politics, as in literature and grammar even, Étienne Pasquier was in harmony with the instincts and the limitations of his nature, and that he fulfilled his whole vocation. If he did not rise above the horizons of his time, it may be observed to his honour that he embraced the whole of them. Born in a strong epoch, but an epoch filled with conflicts and confusion, he offers, in spite of some faults of form and taste, an example of one of the most excellent, the soundest and most gifted among moderate minds.

It would be doing less than justice to his memory not to remark that that quality of *judgment*, which was so much a part of his being, and which he possessed so fully and extensively, is also that quality which has reappeared as a distinctive feature and as a family likeness in the last and most illustrious of his descendants. *Judgment* tempered with *amiability*, the Chancellor Pasquier, more than eight-four years old and in retirement, explains in some degree those happy qualities of his ancestor.

NOTES

Page 3, line 7 from bottom. Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), a Belgian physician and surgeon, and the greatest anatomist of the sixteenth century. Condemned to death by the Inquisition, but his sentence was commuted to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Page 14, line 14. *Clarisse*. Samuel Richardson's novels have always been more read and appreciated in France than in England.

Page 17, line 10 from bottom. *Clélie*; a romance in 10 volumes by Mlle. de Scudéry, in which contemporary life and persons are clothed in the garb of ancient Rome.

Page 20, line 14. Tissot, a Swiss physician, author of *L'Inoculation justifiée* (1754).

Pages 22-23. 'Thy art, fair Genlis, superior to ours, speaks through one sex and charms both. . . . What an enchanting ensemble ! what a charming spectacle ! my heart is still filled with the purest sentiment. . . . Worthy mother, enjoy, enjoy those delights. Thy soul and thy talents are thy just titles to fame. In thee alone we adore to-day at once the author, the work and the actresses !'

Page 23, line 16 from bottom. 'They want to write and become authoresses . . . and in this house more than anywhere else'.

Page 29, line 12. Bouilly and Berquin ; writers of books for the young. The latter enjoys a fame which may be paralleled by that of the late Mr. Bowdler ; both names are immortalised in the verbs *berquiniser* and *bowdlerize*.

Page 30, line 16. Marie-Joseph, the brother of André Chénier.

Page 35, line 9 from bottom. 'Good sense and reason are at the heart of all virtue, genius, wit, talent and good taste. What is virtue ? reason put in practice ; talent ? reason brilliantly displayed ; wit ? reason ingeniously ex-

pressed ; taste is no more than a delicate good sense ; and genius is reason in its sublimity'.

Page 41, line 18 from bottom. Valmiki and Vyasa are both more or less legendary, even the date of their existence being unknown. The former is credited with the authorship of the *Mahābhārata*, the Vedic hymns and other works of a very varied character ; the latter is supposed to have written the *Rāmāyana*. On Firdousi see the first volume of the *Causeries du Lundi*.

Page 44, line 28. 'Let us enjoy, write, ~~live~~, my dear Horace ! . . . I have lived longer than thou : my poetry will not live as long as thine ; but, on the brink of the grave, I will make it my care to follow the teachings of thy philosophy, to despise death while enjoying life, to read thy writings so full of charm and sense, as we drink an old wine that puts life into our hearts'.

Page 46, line 4. Hamilton ; see the first volume of the *Causeries du Lundi*.

Page 50, line 24. Célimène ; see Molière's *Misanthrope*.

Page 60, line 13. 'Lead her back to her apartments, Guards !' (*Britannicus*, Act III, scene viii.)

Page 65, line 5. 'Let the trumpet-blast of the Judgment Day sound when it pleases, I will appear with my book in my hand before the Sovereign Judge'.

Page 75, line 17. *Temple de Guide* ; a tale from an imaginary Greek manuscript, which had a great success in its day, of the loves of two young couples, containing descriptions of a very voluptuous character.

Page 78, line 4. *Jocelyn* ; a poem in Lamartine's decadent style, well characterised by a brother poet, Alfred de Vigny, as 'islands of poetry drowned in an ocean of holy water'.

Page 80, line 12 from bottom. Thermidor ; the 9 Thermidor (July 27, 1794), the date of the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Reign of Terror.

Page 81, line 6 from bottom. A reference to the sparing of Pindar's house by Alexander the Great at the sack of Thebes.

Page 82, line 12. *Ode sur la Prise de Namur*, one of the best known of Boileau's poems.

Page 82, line 14. 'What do I hear ? What cries of joy resound from all sides ? Whence comes this sudden intoxication both of children and old men ? Necker de-

scends from the mountain, accompanied by reason alone ; in him is all the people's hope. Sacred laws, laws for ever stable ! In his hands he bears the two tables ! He will cast down the golden calf '.

Page 84, line 25. The lantern of Sosia ; see Molière's *Amphitruon*, Act I, scene i.

- Page 86, line 6. The touching popular ballad of *Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre* ; it is sung to nearly the same tune as *For he's a jolly good fellow*.

Page 87, line 18. The *Basoche* was a guild of the clerks of the Parliament of Paris, who in the fourteenth century were privileged to perform religious plays. In the following century they had attained to such a degree of licence that they were suppressed.

Page 89, line 13. Mirabeau-Tonneau, a brother of the great tribune, so nicknamed on account of his opposition to new ideas and his drunken habits.

• Page 89, line 14. *Charles IX* ; a tragedy by Marie-Joseph Chénier on the subject of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, which was played amid great enthusiasm a few months after the fall of the Bastille.

Page 110, line 15 from bottom. Abbé Barthélemy ; the author of the once so popular *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis*.

Page 112, line 17. The brilliant Stainvilles ; the most eminent of them was the Duc de Choiseul, the Minister, a very accomplished and witty person.

Page 113, line 12. Condorcet ; see the *Causerie* in the fifth volume of the present translation.

Page 131, line 18. *Usque . . . quaedam opterit ?* ' so constantly does some hidden power trample on human grandeur ' (Lucretius, V, 1233).

Page 131, line 19 from bottom. Mount Tabor was the scene of one of Napoleon's victories over the Turks and Arabs in 1799.

Page 137, line 7 from bottom. Salomon Gessner, a Swiss writer who composed *Idylls* of a rather insipid sentimentality, but charming in their details. Oberlin, the ' Good Pastor of Ban de la Roche ', was not a writer, but a practical philanthropist and social reformer, whose fame extended far beyond the scene of his activity.

Page 141, line 23. ' Enjoy your good fortune, amiable and tender couple ; God gathered for you, under your

peaceful roof, treasures of reason, grace and wit ; the art of being happy was written in your virtuous habits'.

Page 147, last line. The meaning of the last words seems to be that Droz was of Jewish origin, if not a Jew ; that he was not the latter appears clear from his baptismal names, François-Xavier Joseph.

Page 153, line 13. 'The myrtles, the laurels, cultivated in these regions, wait until, culled by the hands of *Emilie*

'What shall I say to thee, O tender Ovid ? you dedicated the Art of Loving . . . ' The offence in the first example lies in the cacophonous repetition of the sound *que-que* ; in the second example in the use of the very unpoetical word *dédiâtes*.

Page 153, line 22. The Abbé Cotin was the drawing-room poet who was immortalised by Boileau in his *Satires*, and by Molière in his *Femmes savantes*, in which he is thinly disguised as *Trissotin* (originally *Tricotin*).

Page 171, line 6 from bottom. *Le Lutrin vivant* ; a merry tale in verse by Gresset. The *live lectern* was one of the chorister boys, whose nether garment had been patched by the Curé's housekeeper with some leaves from the parish missal, with comic results.

Page 171, line 2 from bottom. 'Among the sylvan gods, above all do not forget the one clothed in black and wearing bands. . . . With this habit and this nose, this nose more than two ells long, he must be the *magister* of Fauns'.

Page 173, line 2 from bottom. 'Small is the bee, and with her little sting she deals cruel and troublesome wounds'.

Page 174, line 13 from bottom. 'What among mortals is a piece of effrontery, is with us Demi-Gods only polite gallantry'.

Page 180, line 11. 'My Shepherdess, I seek in vain, I have nothing on my conscience. I pray you, make me to sin : I will do penance after'.

'If I yielded to your entreaty, you would be greatly embarrassed, but more by the sin than by the penance'.

Page 186, line 11. 'I am hardly in the spring-time of life, and already I have feelings . . . '

Page 187, line 23. Voltaire's apotheosis. After his long exile, and in spite of his eighty years, Voltaire yielded

to the entreaties of his friends to visit Paris in 1778, when he was received with every demonstration of enthusiasm ; his bust was crowned on the stage at the first performance of his *Irene*, the Academy held special meetings to honour him, etc.

Page 190, line 17 from bottom. ' I know no Greek, but my soul is tender ; and to judge thy lines my heart suffices ! '

Page 192, line 15 from bottom. ' In thy fine pastoral romance, with thy sheep all pellmell, everybody, shepherd, shepherdess, author, bleats in a very meek and moral tone. The shepherds, author, reader, dog, all go to sleep from sheepishness. Oh ! for a little wolf to come and stir up thy whole sheepfold ! '

Page 196, line 11 from bottom. ' You know the Quai de la Ferraille, where they sell birds, men and flowers : there do I often work at my Fables . . . '

Page 197, line 7. ' The Rabbit's burrow was on the outskirts of a park bordered by a stream. Morning and evening our good friends, profiting by this neighbourhood, would visit each other's dwellings, now on the edge of the water, now under the foliage '.

Page 197, line 19. ' Ah ! if thou could'st cross the water ! Why not ? Wait for me . . . The Teal quits his side, and returns dragging an old nest abandoned by the wild ducks ; quickly she fills it with rushes, treads and presses them down with claws and beak, and makes a boat capable of carrying a heavy burden ; to this vessel then she ties a reed to make a cable. This done, and the ship launched into the water, the Rabbit steps cautiously into the light skiff, sits down, whilst the Teal swimming before drags the reed and guides this bark so dear to her heart '.

Page 197, line 9 from bottom. *The Peasant of the Danube* ; see La Fontaine's *Fables*, XI, vii.

Page 198, line 1. ' When the son of Alcmena, after his long labours, was received in Heaven, all the Gods eagerly advanced to meet this famous hero . . . '

Page 198, line 12. ' A learned rat who would gnaw school exercises in his hut '.

Page 198, line 16 from bottom. ' Labour which keeps aloof all the scourges of our life ; enough wealth to share with others, and not enough to cause envy '.

Page 199, line 4 from bottom. ' To leave before the dawn, groping and blindly, not thinking even of asking the way, to go from fall to fall, and, thus trailing along, to cover but a third of the way before noon ; to see the clouds gathering overhead, to hasten one's steps in moving sand, to speed along, suffering storm after storm, towards an uncertain goal, never to be attained ; disappointed, towards evening, to seek a retreat, to arrive panting, to lie down and go to sleep, they call that to be born, to ~~live~~ and die : God's will be done ! '

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